IMAGINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

The Aftermath of Thoreau

JOSHUA J. BOWMAN

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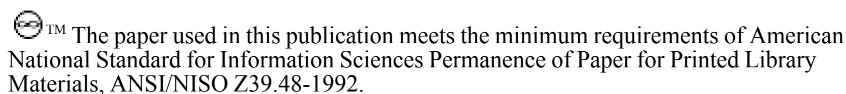
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Solo Deo Gloria

To Melissa, Micah, Lydia, and
in memory of Gary Anderson

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Introduction

Environmentalism can be seen as a practical and passionate response to the many abuses leveled by humanity on the nonhuman world. Polluted water and air, species that are extinct or endangered, climate change, shortages of fresh water, habitat destruction—contemporary society confronts these challenges at every turn. While scientific research and scientists have long played a major role in environmentalism's cultural and political influence, an awareness of environmental disorder predates modern understanding of many common problems, such as climate change and the costs of diminishing biodiversity. Changes wrought by industrialization and population shifts provoked many, especially nineteenth-century Americans, to respond well before a more scientific justification was available. Clean air and water, vast forests, scenic beauty, and fascinating animals and plants had been taken for granted. Now these things were threatened and apathy became less of a viable option.

A scientific understanding of these problems was not the only element lacking, however. In the mid-nineteenth century, there persisted a limited vocabulary and imagination for what the environment was, what humanity's relationship to it looked like, or what it was supposed to look like. The European romantics—especially William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge—as well as figures such as Alexander von Humboldt and Thomas Jefferson, had been moving toward something akin to modern ecology and environmental thought, but their formulations lacked a critical accessibility needed to both popularize their reflections and make them part of the common cultural imagination.

Similar challenges can be seen in the emergence of liberalism and communism. While much of these traditions of political ideology and philosophy have centuries of precursors, it eventually required the intervention of figures

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like John Locke and Karl Marx to bring many disparate elements together and achieve a level of coherence and applicability. Their influence over liberalism and communism is decisive, and someone who claimed to understand either tradition without having considered these seminal figures would justifiably arouse suspicion.

Who, then, is the "John Locke" of environmental thought? Who can environmentalists turn to as a source of intellectual inspiration and common ground, providing both a sense of self-understanding and self-critique? This book is, in part, an attempt to identify that individual as Henry David Thoreau.

Henry David Thoreau is foundational to the history of environmental thought and his influence endures to this day. Such emphasis, however, can be overstated. Locke may have been foundational for liberalism, but this does not mean that figures such as John Stuart Mill, the American Framers, and John Rawls did not offer something original and influential to the tradition. In the same way, Thoreau has become a necessary but insufficient source of environmentalism's roots. While figures such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, David Brower, and Barry Commoner have all propelled environmental thought to become the formidable political and cultural force it is today, they all identify Thoreau as a major source of inspiration and insight.

John Locke, though, provided an explicit political philosophy in his *Two Treatises*. Thoreau left no such account and was openly disdainful of politics. What Thoreau did offer was a distinctive *imagination* that would become part of the mental "furniture" of environmental thought and politics. His way of imagining what is good, true, beautiful, right, and wrong was inherited by his later environmental readers, and became part of the prerational framework from which environmental activism emerged and from which questions of environmental justice and order would be asked. He is not the only voice in this tradition, however, and not all of his readers understood him correctly. Scholars often speak of "many Thoreaus," and given his aphoristic style and love of paradox, the observation makes sense.

No book is likely to offer the definitive account of "which Thoreau" most accurately and comprehensively represents the man himself, but some accounts are better supported by the evidence than others. For the history of environmental political thought then there is a need to identify what, about Thoreau, has had the greatest impact on its development. While the Thoreau that provided a muse for David Brower and Howard Zahniser may not seem to be the same as the Thoreau provoking Wendell Berry and Wallace Stegner, elements of his vision have animated all of them. The goal of this book then is to observe, through a theory of imagination, precisely how modern environmental thought and imagination can be read, in part, as Thoreau's imagination writ large, and to consider the political consequences.

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MISREADING THOREAU

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) has been analyzed at length by both admirers and critics, but he remains inadequately understood in the history of political thought. He is often employed as an inspiration for specific ideological or political persuasions by theorists who overlook many of his ideas. Thanks to standard interpretations of his most famous works, *Walden* (1854) and "Civil Disobedience" (1849), Thoreau has primarily acquired a reputation as the archetype of "rugged individualism," withdrawal and wildness, and a fondness for anarchy. This same reputation has given rise to a number of different and partly contradictory interpretations of his politics. His writings and example are claimed as representative of an extraordinary diversity of perspectives—many of which contradict each other. He has been labeled an anarchist, abolitionist, democrat, liberal, republican, Marxist, misanthrope, prophet, mystic, socialist, humanist, hermit, escapist, romantic, transcendentalist, postmodernist, environmentalist, naturalist, as apolitical, and more. The only noncontroversial description his readers might agree upon is his unquestionable opposition to slavery and his love of nature.

This enduring confusion also reveals something critical about the whole enterprise of reading and interpreting Thoreau: he matters. His footprint on the intellectual and imaginative history of the West—especially in the twentieth century—is consistently underestimated. Writers and thinkers still confront him, apply his ideas, quote his work, and ask whether or not he is on "our side." The Harvard literary scholar, Lawrence Buell, notes that Thoreau "has been canonized as natural historian, pioneer ecologist and environmentalist, social activist, anarchist political theorist, creative artist, and memorable personality combining some or all of these roles."[1] And this fame can be found well beyond America; Thoreau claims "admirers and interpreters in Japan, Australia, India, South Africa, Russia, and eastern and western Europe, as well as in the United Kingdom."[2] In the United States, the cultural impact of Thoreau borders on the ridiculous. As Buell recalls at length:

> [F]rom the mid-sixties through the mid-seventies . . . Thoreau was acclaimed as the first hippie by a nudist magazine, recommended as a model for disturbed teenagers, cited by the Viet Cong in broadcasts urging American GI's to desert, celebrated by environmental activists as "one of our first preservationists," and embraced by a contributor to the John Birch Society magazine as "our greatest reactionary." American astronauts named a moon site after Walden; a Thoreau button was sold in San Francisco; several housing developments were named after him; the Kimberly-Clark Corporation marketed a new grade of paper as "Thoreau vellum;" a rock opera and a black comedy were written about him, as well as the highly successful play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*. A Boston paper considered it news when a *Playboy* girl of the month confessed her love for Thoreau, and the journal *Medical Aspects of*

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> *Human Sexuality* printed a page of quotations entitled "Thoreau on Sex." Allen Ginsberg, Martin Luther King, Jr., B. F. Skinner, and Rod McKuen all paid homage to him.[3]

Despite the enormous and always growing literature on Thoreau, his larger political vision is susceptible to being used for purposes he knew nothing about or could not have anticipated, such as postmodernism and modern environmentalism.[4] There are a number of reasons for this problem. *Walden* is easily his most popular work, but it is not sufficiently representative of his political thought as a whole. Many readers base nearly their entire interpretation of Thoreau on *Walden* and a few influential "Reform Papers." Interpreters of his work may have been too eager to read him through the lens of a particular political camp or ideology. A more systematic examination of Thoreau's ideas, including his neglected larger corpus, yields a much more complex thinker and a fuller understanding of his political thought.

The complexity and tension discovered in Thoreau's writings has profound meaning for his political thought and legacy. If Thoreau's political thought is to be appreciated as comprehensively and accurately as possible, a correspondingly thorough and intricate framework is necessary. Analyzing Thoreau's thought through the framework of a theory of the *imagination* will help in this regard because it allows the *tensions* within his political thought to be understood and appreciated in a fuller sense. While little can be done to dissuade his critics—most of whom have interpreted him quite accurately—his own emphasis on imagination and his particular contribution to "environmental imagination," is of considerable value.

REREADING THOREAU

There is a sense, when analyzing one's imagination, in which all thought can be understood as systematic.[5] But this, by no means, guarantees that such a system will be well organized, easy to identify, or to follow. "System," in the sense employed here, is not the imposition of order but a recognition of the order and interconnectedness in which persons find themselves. It is a system and order that makes knowledge of conceptual "wholes" possible. Thoreau, at times, demonstrates a recognition of this order, but he also frequently succumbs to the temptation to rebel against that order and assert his own. It is no easy task to systematically read a writer who resisted systematic thought as much as possible.

There is still considerable virtue in Thoreau's aphoristic style that accommodates a preoccupation with the imagination. "Thought, like all human life," Claes Ryn observes, "is continuous activity. Although it contains an element of oneness or identity, namely, that it aims at truth, thought never comes to rest in static ideas divorced from the flow of history. Knowledge is

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carried by concepts that can be forever improved."[6] There is a sense of restlessness, movement, and openness animating Thoreau's search for truth. This may be why he held poets and poetry in very high regard and believed, in a manner anticipating Heidegger,[7] that poetry, rather than prose, more fully expressed the truth of lived experience. By striving for a more poetic and aphoristic expression, Thoreau makes explicit and transparent the quality of his imagination.

In light of this, it would be tempting to read Thoreau's incessant use of symbols, allegory, paradox, and pictures as a form of esoteric writing. There is no evidence to suggest that Thoreau had any reason to write in this manner. He did not fear the repercussions of what he said, nor was he motivated, unlike some of his Transcendentalist neighbors, by any need to be deliberately obscure. Thoreau meant what he wrote and wrote what he meant. He could be brutally honest, impulsive, inconsistent, and frustratingly paradoxical. He wrote as deliberately as he lived.

Rereading Thoreau demonstrates that he supersedes existing categories of political thought and philosophy, but he is neither above criticism nor undeserving of admiration. By locating Thoreau's political thought in a tension between the moral and idyllic imagination, and between the corresponding higher and lower will, one may better appreciate Thoreau's complexity and his complicated legacy for environmental politics and thought. While, ultimately, the more idyllic side of his imagination triumphs most often, and needs to be resisted, he will continue to elude classification. There is every reason to believe he would prefer it that way.

NOTES

1. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995) p. 315.
2. Buell, (1995) p. 315.
3. Buell, (1995) pp. 313–14.
4. Concerning Thoreau's association with "postmodernism," political theorist Jane Bennett, attempts to confront and dispute the "apolitical" interpretation of Thoreau by placing his political thought in conversation with twentieth century postmodern thinkers and others, such as Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, Mila Kundera, Gilles Deleuze, Franz Kafka, and Feliz Guattari. This postmodern reading rests on three elements of Thoreau's work: (1) the positing of a tension between a sense of the utterly subjective nature of reality and a sense of its wild, unmanageable character; (2) the manifestation of a peculiar set of anxieties and a fear of conformity, restraint, limitations, and any obstacle to individuality, autonomy, and privacy; and (3) Thoreau's respect for the "Wild" conceived as that which defies cultural conventions. See Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, new ed., (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
5. Claes G. Ryn, *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem or Reality*, originally published in 1986, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997) p. xxiv.
6. Ryn, (1997) p. 120.

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7. For more on the comparison between Thoreau and Heidegger, see Stanley Cavell, "Night and Day: Heidegger and Thoreau," in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. by James E. Faulconer, (New York: Cambridge University, 2000).

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I

Imagination and Political Thought

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Chapter One

Politics and Imagination

THOREAU ON THE IMAGINATION

The explosion in scientific discoveries during Thoreau's lifetime, the peculiar cast of literary characters in and around Concord, and his interest in travel literature and the natural world provided considerable provocation for the creative imagination. A thoughtful individual of his time and place would be unlikely to overlook and reflect on the imagination's centrality. It is no surprise, then, that such an interest appears rather early, beginning with his days at Harvard.

Several of Thoreau's college essays survived, and in 1836 he responded to the following prompt: "The Love of stories, real or fabulous, in young and old. Account for it, and show what good use it may serve."[1] He responds by writing of the mystery of life and the way in which the love of pleasure—especially that afforded by novelty—has considerable bearing on what human beings do and who they are.[2] The imagination, referred to as a "divine faculty," eschews didacticism, and works to synthesize "sensation" and "reflection" into wholes. These wholes, functioning as networks of concepts, color the narratives or visions of life which inform how humans live. Significantly, Thoreau focuses on the imagination's ability to give meaning to the novelty of life and to offer an escape or solace to both young and old. Indeed, it would seem the activity of the imagination is more important for pleasure than for virtue and character, though he would increasingly come to appreciate the ethical dimension of the imagination.

Finally, in this same essay, Thoreau describes "a mutual inter-changing of imaginings" as the encounter one has with the imaginative expressions of others, shaping one's identity and what one loves. This interchange "reconciles us to the world—our friends—ourselves"[3] and contributes to the forma-

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tion of individual character. These imaginings and subsequent expressions are deeply moral moments for Thoreau. "Whatever is said or done, seen or heard, is in any way taken cognizance of by the senses or the understanding," he writes, "produces its effect—contributes its mite towards to the formation of the character. Every sentence that is framed, every word that is uttered, is framed or uttered for good or for evil, nothing is lost."[4]

Stories become major building blocks of humans' moral foundations. They are the "principles of our principles."[5] Thoreau puts tremendous responsibility and influence then, into the hands of authors and other artists whose expression necessarily evokes a vision of what is real, right, wrong, good, true, and beautiful. The young Thoreau, however, seems less concerned with whether or not the imagination is rooted in reality. Escapism is not a problem and may even be a sign of maturity. Still, there is something about the love of stories that requires honesty, morality, and the cultivation of community. "The Love of Stories and Story-telling," he concludes the essay, "cherishes a purity of heart, a frankness and candor of disposition, a respect for what is generous and elevated, a contempt for what is mean and dishonorable, a proper regard *for*, and independence *of*, the petty trials of life, & tends to multiply merry companions and never-failing friends."[6] There is something about the love of stories that evokes one's moral compass and discernment. In a later essay, Thoreau also maintains that the imagination is neither passive nor a decaying sense.[7] It participates in knowing and doing alongside the discriminating function of reason. It is, in keeping with the European Romantics' reappraisal of the imagination, *creative* and uninhibited.[8]

The imagination is of great importance for Thoreau. He goes on to encourage persons to balance a cultivation of the mind, body, and imagination, never attending to one and unduly neglecting the other. Such neglect would fail to cultivate the full human person, hindering one's ability to realize his or her complexity, thereby frustrating the pursuit of happiness. "Unlike most other pleasures" he explains, "those of the Imagination are not momentary and evanescent, its powers are rather increased than worn out by exercise; the old, no less than the young, find their supreme delight in the building of cob-houses and air castles out of the fragments of different conceptions. It is not so with the pleasures of sense."[9] He again omits any criteria by which to evaluate that cultivation of imagination. Simply accumulating more "material" from experience and reflection, and from the imaginings of others, is not itself indicative of a moral or corrupt imagination. What does one *do* with the imaginative vision, and why prefer some visions over others? What role has the *will* in relation to the imagination?

The limitations and insights of the young Thoreau are instructive. First, Thoreau stands in the rather young (at the time) tradition of those building on and reformulating the preromantic and classical understanding of imagina-

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tion as essentially passive, imitative or as merely a kind of mental mirror.[10] While more primitive sources of aesthetic philosophy, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, were sympathetic to the sense of a whole, unified vision, they did not fully appreciate the creative and ethical side of this "power," nor would they have necessarily understood an artistic expression as reflective of the character of the artist. Beginning with Rousseau and the romantics, as well as with figures such as Dugald Stewart—whom Thoreau had read for the Harvard essays discussed above—the imagination's creative and illuminative nature emerged as central to knowledge. A number of great thinkers and leaders, particularly William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, began to acknowledge that man's moral character had considerable bearing on his or her *capacity* to know and *what* one came to know and express.[11] The imagination was now revealed to be more active, constructing wholes as well as experiencing them.

Thoreau does not provide a systematic theory of knowledge in the same sense as the theory animating this study. Still, beyond the Harvard essays, he did speak of imagination and was occasionally transparent as to how he understood its centrality.[12] Thoreau, for example, consistently asserts that one must be prepared for what they will see. Individuals see what they want to see, and they see it *as* they want to see it. Experience, desire, and emotion, awareness of physical and historical context—all these things contribute to what humans perceive and how they interpret it. As Thoreau explained, "We cannot see anything unless we are possessed with the idea of it, and then we can hardly see anything else."[13] In the essay "Life without Principle," Thoreau writes that "Only the character of the hearer determines to which it shall be open, and to which closed."[14] Alfred Tauber observes that, for Thoreau, "Knowledge is selective. We know what we want to know, or at least seek knowledge in the particular context of self-interest. Each of us follows his or her unique train."[15] Not only is man *prepared* then, but he is potentially limited and/or enlarged by his subjectivity, which one cannot and need not escape. "There is no such thing as pure objective observation." Thoreau writes in his *Journal*. "Your observation, to be interesting, i.e., to be significant, must be subjective. . . . If it is possible to conceive of an event outside to humanity, it is not of the slightest significance."[16]

Earlier he had written in the spirit of this subjectivity that "the question is not what you look at, but what you see."[17] And in a "Natural History of Massachusetts" he reminds his readers of the temporal or historical conditions for *seeing*: "We must look a long time before we can see."[18] One's conscience is the only starting point and while that is a positive aspect for Thoreau and Emerson,[19] it also means that one's moral character is critical to *what* one sees, *how* they see it, and their *ability* to see in the first place. For

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Thoreau "there is no neat separation between knowing the world (epistemologically) and valuing that knowledge (a moral judgment)."[20] Leo Marx observed a similar aspect of Thoreau, explaining that:

> Thoreau is clear, as Emerson seldom was, about the location of meaning and value. He is saying that it does not reside in the natural facts or in social institutions or in anything "out there," but in consciousness. It is a product of imaginative perception, of the analogy-perceiving, metaphor-making, mythopoetic power of the human mind.[21]

The inescapable centrality of the subject and one's moral character means that one cannot separate the author or artist from the work of art. Understood another way, an artistic expression or writing is the fruit of the artist or author's ethical-aesthetico disposition. A person knows what he or she wills to know, but that will, and the activity the will begets, provides the substance for the intuition preceding the will/action. That action and the imagination/intuition informing it supply the content of one's character.

Thoreau writes in his *Journal,* "Our feet must be imaginative, must know the earth in imagination only, as well as our heads."[22] Then, in his most explicit explanation of how he understands philosophy generally, he writes that:

> There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.[23]

Building and dwelling at Walden Pond are just as important, and just as philosophical, as the writing of *Walden* itself. His trips to Maine and Cape Cod, excursions to nearby mountains and villages, his lectures and his assistance to runaway slaves and marginalized Irish immigrants were all as much a part of his philosophy as was the content of his works. Writing about Thomas Carlyle, Thoreau asserts that "The philosopher's conception of things will, above all, be truer than other men's, and his philosophy will subordinate all the circumstances of life. To live like a philosopher is to live, not foolishly, like other men, but wisely and according to universal laws."[24] On the one hand, the mention of "universal laws" risks moving the philosopher into ahistorical abstraction. On the other hand, Thoreau is bringing to the fore another significant element of his understanding of imagination, which he shares with Emerson: a belief in the unity of all knowledge.

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The recognition of one's subjectivity is not itself a blindness to the "common humanity and common world" in which the self participates.[25] Emerson writes, "There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same."[26] Thoreau, in the same spirit, observes "Go where we will, we discover infinite change in particulars only, not in generals."[27] And in his essay, "Walking," Thoreau exclaims that "I walk out into a nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in."[28] The world of the Greeks and the Romans is his. As biographer Robert D. Richardson writes, "Thoreau's conception of history, like Emerson's, would not concede any superiority to the Greeks and Romans. If nature was the same and if men were the same—two constants in a world of change—then the modern writer stood in relation to his world in just the same way Homer stood in relation to his, and modern achievements could indeed rival the ancients."[29] The great writers of history are great inasmuch as their particularity partakes of the same universal, timeless reality which Thoreau himself can access. The problem for Thoreau is that this particularity is viewed more as an obstacle in the realm of politics than it is in the world of poetry, literature, and art.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of imagination for Thoreau. He was deeply concerned with how one *sees* and understands, and what that meant for how one lives. "The Imagination," Tauber writes, is "as close to a vital center as we might find in Thoreau's moral cosmos, [and it] is more than our faculty by which to understand nature, or create art, for it serves as the means by which the self might grow according to its own telos."[30] The imagination is where human identity develops and where humans recognize the experience of freedom. It also means that seeing and knowing are deeply moral activities.

Thoreau's understanding of imagination was ultimately underdeveloped, especially as it pertained to the role of imagination in the ethical life and vice versa. Imagination was a powerful and creative, but morally neutral, faculty of perception, learning, and pleasure. Neglecting the criteria necessary for evaluating the quality of one's imagination, though, leaves the individual vulnerable to a veritable minefield of misleading and dangerous visions. Indeed, Thoreau was rather cavalier about the possibility of a disordered imagination. "I do not think much of the actual," he wrote in his *Journal* in July of 1850, "it is something that we have long since done [away] with. It is [a] sort of vomit in which the unclean love to wallow."[31] And in a letter to his friend H. G. O. Blake the following month, Thoreau writes, "I find that actual events, notwithstanding the singular prominence which we all allow them, are far less real than the creations of my imagination."[32]

The criteria by which the quality of one's imagination is evaluated is its attunement to reality in the most comprehensive sense of the word. That is, the concrete, historical reality as well as the moral and spiritual reality of the

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present. Thoreau would likely reject this criteria or simply emphasize the subjectivity of such a formulation. Yet this disposition is precisely why later environmentalists would benefit from revisiting his work. In many instances, they have inherited Thoreau's ambivalence toward evaluating the quality of one's imagination. But the consequences of such a disposition manifest themselves in the misdiagnosis or oversimplification of environmental problems and solutions. Neglecting the imagination opens the door to more ideological and misanthropic streams of environmentalism while also overlooking a critical tool for cultivating ecologically sensitive individuals and cultures. In Thoreau, then, environmentalism not only finds the resources for reform and self-understanding but also for self-critique.

The criticism of Thoreau and his environmental heirs offered herein is meant to be primarily constructive. An imagination of a poor quality will beget ineffective or irresponsible behavior in environmental politics or otherwise. But an admirable imagination offers much to the reform and endurance of all that environmentalism seeks to achieve. There is simply too much at stake in the realm of environmental politics to confront such complex ecological problems with an underdeveloped or immoral imagination.

Thoreau, then provides valuable reflections on the importance and nature of imagination, but he does not offer a more systematic treatment of the term. Humans see what they are prepared to see, as Thoreau believed, but how does that preparation occur? Can varying levels of preparation be identified? What is the importance of morality and principle—key foundations of all Thoreau's thought—for knowing, seeing, and expression? The theory of imagination that follows builds on and corrects Thoreau's own understanding.

IMAGINATION AS EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICAL THEORY

The sources for Thoreau's understanding of imagination, as with his thought generally, are difficult to identify. He did not set out to conform to or rearticulate someone else's theory of imagination or to synthesize a collection of ideas about imagination. Always striving for independence, Thoreau attempted to use his own reflections and experiences to generate an understanding of imagination. Still, his formulation evinces the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the European Romantics, as well as ancient classics of Greek and Latin, Goethe, English poetry, and the work of Emerson. Though not drawing on a monolithic tradition or school of thought, Thoreau's reflections are consistent with his classical education and the Transcendentalists' debt to German idealism and romanticism. Drawing out intellectual lineages between Thoreau and these traditions, however, is rather

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difficult and ultimately speculative. In order to analyze and evaluate Thoreau's imagination fairly then, it will help to construct a more systematic treatment of imagination drawing on the same intellectual context.

At the turn of the twentieth century, two thinkers—neither of whom is widely known or read by the English-speaking world today—were drawing on an intellectual lineage quite similar to Thoreau's. Under the influence of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, German idealism, and the European romantics, the Italian philosopher and statesman, Benedetto Croce, and the Harvard literary scholar, Irving Babbitt were constructing their own articulation of the relationship between imagination and corresponding concepts of will, reason, intuition, epistemology, aesthetics, politics, and morality. Neither figure, to my knowledge, ever referenced Thoreau, though Babbitt greatly admired Emerson. Finding common ground between Croce, Babbitt, and Thoreau then is no simple task. A synthesis of Babbitt and Croce's work, however, provides a foundation on which to build a theory of imagination which is mostly consistent with Thoreau's own understanding.

Thankfully, a synthesis of Babbitt and Croce has already been achieved by the political theorist, Claes Ryn, who has long sought to build on the insights of modern aesthetics and to systematically consider the centrality of imagination for politics. In addition to Thoreau's work, the theory that follows embraces and builds on Ryn's theory, in order to construct a more practical framework for analysis, and one which is consistent with much of Thoreau's own sources.

The study of political theory and philosophy in the twentieth century was significantly influenced by a number of analytical frameworks, methodologies, and perspectives, but the role of imagination was mostly neglected. Yet, by specifically focusing on tensions *within* the imagination, the theory that follows may allow for a more incisive reflection on moral and spiritual questions than a consideration of "worldviews" in tension. It encourages more attention to a thinker's innermost sensibility than an analysis of cultural context, and it makes possible a deeper investigation of a person's sense of reality than would an examination of a tension among ideologies. Worldviews and ideologies tend to pick and choose which pieces of reality their abstractions will or will not accommodate, and they may subordinate imagination to the rational despite the former's importance for human identity and behavior. While underlying imaginative visions are not always brought to conscious awareness, this theory looks for the imaginative sources of particular intellectual constructs. Finally, the theory of imagination offered here views neither reason nor rationality as paramount or as corrupted tools to be discarded. Instead, the cultivation of a more philosophical reason will be encouraged, that is, a reason informed by the moral imagination animated by an historical sensibility.

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The imagination, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is a "power," or a form of consciousness that is synonymous with intuition.[33] It is creative and constitutive of our most basic sense of reality—human freedom, morality, truth, beauty, etc. The imagination both shapes and is shaped by will/desire and is capable of a broad and qualitatively diverse range of intuition which varies depending on one's orientation of will. It is most fundamentally through imagination that an individual or group of people holds an intuitive sense of what is real, right, wrong, good, true, and beautiful. The overall goal in emphasizing imagination, then, is not to expose a form of esoteric writing or to disproportionately emphasize what Thoreau did *not* say, but to identify the underlying prerational unity and vision which animated his arguments, assertions, and behavior.

The relationship between will and imagination is particularly critical to this theory, and an understanding of their interaction expands the repertoire of questions and ideas subjected to the scrutiny of political theory. Claes Ryn defines will as "the generic, categorical name for that infinity and variety of impulse that orients the individual to particular tasks."[34] Humans think and do what they will and desire to do.[35] The will "sustains" and directs human character and behavior, but the direction that our will takes is informed by the imagination.[36] The will/desire becomes aware of itself by means of the imagination.[37] Precisely how that desire translates into imagination, however, is informed by the *quality* of imagination—a quality determined by its hold on reality.

The quality of one's imagination also predisposes an individual to a particular ethical character. Humanity's intrinsic moral predicament, namely the struggle between good and evil, shapes and is shaped by the content of our imagination as well as by the tension between an attunement toward reality and our desire to escape it. The imagination, then, holds considerable power over the identity and character of an individual or a group. It gives content to individuality and human relationships and places. This means that the study of man ought to place considerable emphasis on art, tradition, and experience as fundamental influences on human morality and reason.

The relationship between imagination and reality, though, cuts both ways. As Ryn explains, "knowledge of reality rests upon a certain orientation of the will and upon the corresponding quality of imagination (intuition) that the will begets. Reason is dependent for the truth and comprehensiveness of its concepts on the depth and scope of the material that it receives from the imagination."[38] In other words, an effective epistemology and an adequate notion of philosophical reason require extensive attention to the intuitive and ethicopractical side of thought. Moral character directly impacts how and what an individual knows, and especially how they navigate the perennial tension between the "universal" and the "particular." As this theory will argue, one should not attend to either the universal or to the historical partic-

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ulars of life at the expense of the other. A more realistic and humane—but no less creative—political theory then, is animated by a more "philosophical reason," which "joins the universal and the historical."[39] Human beings become who they are and develop their view of the world through the interplay of will, imagination, and reason.

This theory, then, is not meant merely to describe the interplay of imagination, will, and reason. It intends to fully assess its fruits. Ethically admirable or "higher" will and a corrupt "lower" will can be distinguished, but modern philosophy fails to offer a compelling criterion for this distinction because it ignores experiential fruits.[40] In particular, "attempts by modern philosophy to solve the problem of knowledge rest on a vain belief in abstract rationality."[41] Appeals to such rationality "signify a failure to understand that, in the end, man will attach himself only to a standard of reality that has immediacy and concreteness—that is, one firmly established in experience."[42] The criterion for the dichotomy between the higher and lower will (and, in aesthetics, between the moral and idyllic imagination) then, is concrete experiential reality past and present—our own and that of others. This reality can only be known in experience, but is nevertheless subject to philosophical investigation.[43] The will becomes central to this investigation because "more than anywhere else, man discovers the essence of reality in ethical action."[44]

The struggle to know reality and to will the good is a permanent task of human civilization. No human being can gain access to truth in its entirety, nor will moral order ever be realized completely. The fundamental limitations of human existence present an obstacle to a full understanding of reality, but such an admission must not be construed as a concession to radical subjectivism, skepticism, or relativism. The moral and philosophical life constantly involves a struggle between an attunement or will to reality and a revolt against, or an evasion of, reality. This attunement and movement toward reality characterizes the higher will and the corresponding moral imagination, while the revolt or evasion distinguishes the lower will and the idyllic imagination. The moral imagination and the higher will strive for and express moderation, order, prudence, proportion, and the restraints of tradition and civilization. The idyllic imagination, on the other hand, favors what is spontaneous, "wild," unrestrained, and merely sentimental. The latter kind of imagination celebrates human freedom understood as opposed to the inhibitions of tradition, civilization, and historical experience.

The distinction set forth above likely strikes the modern reader as arbitrary and very "unscientific." It is not grounded in an explicit understanding of psychology, an abstract notion of "nature," a school of thought, or a single religion. It is also not meant to be absolute, definitive, or rigid. The distinction is, instead, rooted in the long and complicated history of the Western world and in humanity's interminable struggle to know and live the good, the

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true, and the beautiful. Admittedly, the criteria nod toward Classical Greek and Roman as well as Christian conceptions of virtue and vice, but it would be a mistake to view this perspective as parochial or merely "Western." As Irving Babbitt, not to mention Thoreau, have shown, much of what is celebrated as a virtue in the West finds remarkably sympathetic and parallel expression in the East. On questions of the ethical life, for example, there is significant agreement between Christianity and Buddhism and between Aristotle and Confucius.

Over time, those aspects associated with the "moral imagination" and the "higher will," have produced "fruit" in keeping with human dignity, peace, discovery, community, truth, goodness, and beauty. The virtues of moderation, prudence, humility, and restraint, for example correspond historically to those individuals and actions representative of what is widely considered the "best" of humanity. Such a seemingly subjective formulation may raise eyebrows, unless one assumes that human history is one of the primary means by which the good, the true, and the beautiful are disclosed. This emphasis on the historical need not be at the expense of the universal.[45]

It is important to note here, however, that the tensions within which Thoreau and others live, that is, between the idyllic and moral imagination, occurs within the same person. Thoreau, like most individuals, is never wholly given to one or the other, and reading his work often leads to an examination of one's self. As Croce remarked, "Great artists are said to reveal us to ourselves."[46] Thoreau is no exception. The purpose of this study is not to identify Thoreau as wholly moral or idyllic, but to understand how his living and thinking between the two types of imagination shape who he was, inform what he said, and explain his legacy.

THE ONE AND THE MANY

The interplay of will, imagination, and reason produces the behaviors and beliefs which constitute morality. In other words, the imagination of a concrete, ethical action, and the *desire* to perform that action are simultaneous.[47] Indeed, the desire to act would be unaware of itself without images of concrete action, and the action or the imaging would not take place without a corresponding will/desire. Whether a belief or behavior corresponds to the moral imagination, though, is dependent on how consistent it is with the good, the true, and the beautiful as disclosed by history and experience.

The problem with this formulation is that it is susceptible to a radical perspectivism, relativism, or subjectivism at odds with the very existence of goodness, truth, and beauty. Furthermore, if the fruits of the moral imagination are celebrated as historical high points, then the fruits of the idyllic imagination are lamented as moments of great darkness. In order to articulate

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what is meant by this distinction, the relationship between history and morality needs to be rearticulated, in part, by defining what is meant by a "concept."

The intuition of historically grounded wholes—that is, the sense in which the past and present, experience and intuition, opinion and knowledge, reality and mystery all fit together—is elaborated by philosophy and brought to life in narrative and works of imagination by means of concepts. As Irving Babbitt explains, then, "[i]f we mean by imagination not merely what we perceive, but what we conceive, it follows inevitably that the problem of the imagination is closely bound up with that of the One and the Many."[48] "What we conceive" is Babbitt's way of speaking of the synthetic role of the imagination, and the ability of the imagination to grasp the universal—a capacity which older philosophical traditions attached only to reason. The moral imagination, then, creates concepts which conjoin the universal and the particular in fidelity to reality. In moments of imaginative "conception," then, universals and particulars (Babbitt's "One" and the "Many") are synthesized into complex wholes or "worlds." Babbitt further emphasizes that this quality of imagination is deeply tied to the higher will. Individuals often resist, for example, what they do not *want* to see and embrace what they wish were the case. Persuasion is often difficult if the persuader and the individual being persuaded have contradictory intuitions of the world or conflicting visions of the universal and particular. Reason alone may be inadequate to the task. The ethical will centers human imagination and roots it in the real world, but will of a different kind may pull the imagination into self-serving illusion, making persuasion increasingly difficult. An individual perceives and conceives what she does because of who she is, and much of what makes human relationships "work," is built on the extent to which we share common conceptions of the present moment.

When studying the work of someone like Thoreau or considering his legacy for modern environmentalism then, how might one discern whether his concepts are the product of the moral imagination? For Irving Babbitt, this task, and knowledge of reality generally, calls for a *discipline* of resisting idyllic intuitions of the world and of affirming the moral imagination. Moral virtue, character, and knowledge are not primarily dependent on the depth of one's theoretical knowledge, but, rather, on the quality of one's will and the ability to discern and imitate moral excellence.[49] The primacy of imitation and practical activity are critical for understanding the moral and idyllic imagination, for both are shaped by the will—the former by diligent exercise of the higher will, the latter by a lazy self-indulgent will. The moral imagination corresponds to a will toward reality and what Babbitt calls "civilization" while the idyllic imagination clouds or distorts reality. The will and imagination of an individual shape, and are shaped by, the extent to which one is

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more or less receptive to the world as it really is. In the end, the ability to discriminate among illusory and realistic notions depends on the ethical will orienting us to reality.[50]

While analyzing Thoreau's writings, we read expressions of his imagination. His intuitions color and shape his more historical-philosophical observations. What does he perceive as important or universal? How does he synthesize, or fail to synthesize, universality with the particulars of human experience? How and why did he pick that synthesis or articulate that expression or use that example? Thoreau's writings and their moral and intellectual quality ought not to be interpreted or judged apart from how his imagination works. Indeed, Thoreau would not want his readers to make such a separation.

This understanding of imagination and the will draws attention to the great influence of artists, poets, composers, and women and men of literature. Emerson remarks in this vein that "Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind."[51] Such individuals have a way of shaping and expressing "the tenor of an age," drawing us "into their visions in intricate and subtle ways, and making us see the world through their eyes."[52]

The importance and power of appealing to the imagination and to create and inspire "visions" of life, morality, and politics is a key reason for Thoreau's influence among political theorists. His imaginative vision continues to persuade and provoke. He continues to hold considerable sway in a number of ways and especially over American environmentalism. As Lawrence Buell observes, "Thoreau has had a history of changing peoples' lives . . . and one cannot understand any historical actor's significance without confronting posterity's repossession of him."[53] Thoreau's ability to "change" people and to inspire readers to imitate him is to a great extent attributable to the pull of his imagination.

IMAGINATION AND POLITICS

What does imagination, as understood here, have to do with politics? Irving Babbitt once observed that, "when studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem."[54] The isolation of economic questions from moral questions or religious questions from political questions, is artificial. Though such isolation is helpful for more nuanced analysis at times, a mature imagination recognizes the interconnectedness at the heart of life's most important challenges. It is within the imagination that this "running together" takes place.

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At a moment when a more interdisciplinary perspective was falling out of favor, Henry David Thoreau was quite successful at resisting the problems associated with narrow specialization. This is why, though Thoreau never composed anything like a treatise in political philosophy or on environmental political thought, his work speaks to these disciplines. The working theory of imagination eschews narrow specialization as well and recognizes the presence of politically significant reflection where it may or may not have been intended.

Politics, in this interdisciplinary context then, is not simply the study of constitutions, decision making, public administration, and ideologies. It begins with assumptions about human nature and the ethical life. Plato was among the greatest representatives of such thinking, demonstrating that the order of the polis or political community reflects the order of the soul. Thoreau's politics and his experience of the tension between the moral and idyllic imagination then cannot be understood without first appreciating the relationship of morality and human nature with imagination. In a way, the working theory argues that the order of the polis is the order of the imagination, writ large.[55]

For the individual, as well, political beliefs and behavior indicate more than an adherence to a particular platform, ideology, culture, or even a set of values. Politics occurs within a comprehensive view of life, and our political behavior and beliefs draw on concepts and on our corresponding intuition of reality, which helps direct our action. Human beings act in the world in which they find themselves and which they perceive through imagination. Because will and imagination are simultaneous, one imagines the context (spatial, temporal, moral, etc.) in which an action has to be taken before that action takes place. Human actions and related experiences in turn shape imaginations and the way individuals behave in the future. While one can observe a connection between specific values, cultural prejudices, and ideological preferences, and particular political activities on the one hand, attention to the broadest context and sources of these particular influences discloses the large and pervasive role of the imagination as our most fundamental sense of what life is like. The imagination in this wider sense provides the general background for our particular preferences, directs reason, and ultimately shapes our will and behavior. The quality of a person's imagination is especially indicative of the nature of the person's political morality, just as the latter influences the quality of the imagination.

In this analysis, "politics" encompasses more than Thoreau's views on such issues as war, property, slavery, and the size of government. Politics is more than the "art and science of government," a set of policy preferences or party platforms, the distribution and practice of power, the management of scarce resources, or the processes of decision making. All of these elements do characterize the "political," but they do not operate beyond imagination.

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Ethical questions of "how shall we live," theological and moral inquiries as to "what is the good," and cultural reflections regarding tradition, value, and identity impact the activities and thoughts commonly viewed as the "political." Eric Voegelin expanded the understanding of politics in a similar manner, opening his *New Science of Politics* by saying: "The existence of man in political society is historical existence; and a theory of politics, if it penetrates to principles, must at the same time be a theory of history."[56] Voegelin's considerations, too, imply, even if they do not explicitly recognize, the imaginative and historical "background" of human existence.[57]

All of the above can be incorporated into an understanding of politics that would be agreeable to Thoreau, who never compartmentalized his thinking into separate "disciplines." He assumed a fundamental interconnectedness in his thought and was adamant about the incorporation of questions of morality into politics. It is equally important, however, that the same man would also famously write, "That government is best which governs not at all."[58] To say that all is political is not necessarily a statement about the jurisdiction or practice of *government*.

Thoreau's political thought exhibits a marked tension between the moral and the idyllic imagination. He is not always on any one side, and this struggle accounts for much of the complexity of his thought as well as for that complexity's significance. Adopting a broad definition of the "political" and focusing on imagination as the basis for one's view of reality allows Thoreau's overall thought to disclose itself more freely.

IMAGINATION, RHETORIC, AND PROPAGANDA

A theory of imagination can easily be misunderstood as a convoluted theory of rhetoric or propaganda. Since this can lead to more significant complications later on, the relationship of rhetoric and propaganda with imagination will be fleshed-out more explicitly.

The first, and arguably most significant, difference is that, in contrast to rhetoric and propaganda, a theory of imagination is preoccupied with the question of knowledge, or epistemology. Rhetoric and propaganda are concerned with the style, intention, and content of information as it is *communicated*, not how or why something is *known*. This communication is preceded by the imagination and, in turn, shapes the imaginations of others.

Rhetoric, in the most basic sense, is the art of using language for the purpose of persuasion. Identifying it as an *art* implies that it is a product of the imagination. The quality of one's imagination is a function of its hold on reality, in the broadest sense. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is evaluated based on its ability to achieve a certain goal. Whether or not what one is being persuaded to do or believe is itself good or true is another question. The art of

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rhetoric is indifferent to truth and goodness, even if the rhetorician is not.[59] Rhetoric understood as a work of imagination, however, can then be evaluated on its relationship to reality. A successful rhetorician is one whose means achieve his end. Rhetoric animated by the moral imagination is not only successful, but is faithful to reality in the broadest sense. Rhetoric animated by the idyllic imagination is usually less successful (especially in the long-run) for the simple reason that it lacks fidelity to immediate, concrete experience and to reality.

A qualification must be made, however, regarding "success" relative to rhetoric, since the rhetorician is limited by the imaginations of his or her audience. Rhetoric that is born in the idyllic imagination will be successful among those who tend to favor an idyllic imagination. The will of the listener is a variable which the rhetorician hopes to influence, but cannot ultimately control. This is a cause of considerable frustration for the propagandist.

The relationship between imagination and rhetoric, however, brings to light an important point: it is often through the use of rhetoric, especially, that one can learn a lot about the imagination of a speaker or writer and the imaginations of his or her readers and listeners. Even if the speaker does not believe his own rhetoric and propaganda as objectively true, his audience might. Furthermore, rhetorical skill is not primarily or simply animated by deception. The writer may actually believe what they are saying to be objectively true. Distinguishing moments of rhetorical creativity that deliberately obscures or exaggerates from moments in which rhetoric is a communication of closely held beliefs about truth, is very difficult. The old Biblical adage, however, that "by their fruits you will know them," is instructive. What one writes and says may be different than the way one lives, or a thinker as revealed in her private journal or letters turns out to be quite different from the individual revealed in public and in published material.

In many ways, propaganda is similar to, if not indistinguishable from, rhetoric. It too wants to persuade. It may take the form of pictures, music, film, and more. There are techniques to propaganda—even something of an "art" to it—though it does not draw exclusively on the insights of rhetoric as a distinct, historical discipline. According to Jacques Ellul, however, propaganda is much more comprehensive and scientific, rooted in the insights of psychology especially. It eschews detail and context, indulges in oversimplification and exaggeration as necessary, and treats mankind as "reduced to an average."[60] Propaganda discourages conversation, as Ellul writes: "Propaganda ceases where simple dialogue begins."[61] The goal of propaganda is more than mere persuasion, it seeks conformity to a particular attitude or idea and opposes independent, critical thought. Control, not truth, is the preoccupation of the propagandist. "Propaganda carries within itself, of intrinsic necessity," Ellul observes, "the power to take over everything that can serve it."[62] While rhetoric may be a *way* of thinking, propaganda commands *what*

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to think. Finally, propaganda initially gives preference to the provocation of specific actions over the formation of particular ideas. Propagandists understand that, if subjected to any sustained scrutiny or reflection, the content of their work will be exposed for the lie that it often is. On the other hand, if one begins to act into that idea, the individual may adopt the attitude more strongly with little attention to whether or not it makes much sense.[63]

Rhetoric, on the other hand, can be used for far less pernicious reasons. It can be used to persuade, strengthen, and encourage someone *toward* the good, the true, and the beautiful. But the imagination is not simply in the service of persuasion. It is also crucial in moments of decision and description, for example.

Henry David Thoreau was not engaged in anything approaching propaganda. And in many ways, he was not interested in carefully constructed rhetoric as much as simply communicating the truth. Expression, not for the sake of persuasion or information, but for its own sake, need not take on the character of rhetoric. Indeed, both propaganda and rhetoric are deliberately conceived as such. They channel expression toward the achievement of an end beyond itself. Thoreau certainly demonstrated moments of rhetorical acumen in his public addresses, in *Walden* and some of his letters. But his *Journal* seldom shows any deliberateness in terms of rhetorical style. He is more concerned with explaining and describing and is less preoccupied with persuasion.

Later environmentalists, however, are more concerned with persuasion than Thoreau was. Looking more closely at them reveals that, while there was little in the way of a rhetorical style to inherit from Thoreau, he did offer a vision of the world and morality which animated later environmentalists' rhetoric. Thoreau also, in a sense, helped prime the culture of mid-twentieth-century America to embrace the vision of environmentalism. He was not alone in this preparation, but much of the language on which environmental thought depends originates with him.

NOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Early Essays and Miscellanies*. Edited by Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Edwin Moser, with Alexander C. Kern, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1975) p. 45.
2. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, pp. 45–46.
3. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 46.
4. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 47.
5. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 47.
6. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 47.
7. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 47.
8. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 49.
9. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, p. 49.
10. See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University, 1953).

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11. This distinction between the preromantic and Romantic conceptions of imagination is indebted to Abrams (1953).

12. Alfred Tauber notes, for example that: "*Imagination* is the Romantic faculty par excellence. It is to imagination that Thoreau turns again and again as the cognitive apparatus upon which he builds his history, his science, his poetry. In the *Journal*, the vision of Walden Pond, first appearing to him as a child, remains scored in Thoreau's *imagination*, actively working and directing him. The memory is no longer *of* the past, but resides firmly *in* his active present. His entire life is devoted to the emancipation of that imagination, the free expression of all that this muse might hold for him, whether expressed by him as a naturalist, a historian, a philosopher, or a poet." Alfred I Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 2001) p. 62.

13. Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau: In Fourteen Volumes Bound as Two*, 2 Vols. ed. by Bradford Torrey and F. H. Allen, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1962). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Thoreau's *Journal* are from these volumes, and references will indicate the volume, chapter, date, and page number of the 1906 edition, vol. XI, ch. 5, November 4, 1858, p. 285.

14. Henry David Thoreau, "Life without Principle," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) pp. 172–73.

15. Tauber, (2001) p. 2.

16. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. VI, ch. 6, May 6, 1854, pp. 236–37.

17. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. 7, August 5, 1851, p. 373.

18. Henry David Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," in *The Writings of Henry D. David Thoreau*: *Excursions*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) p. 28.

19. Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1986) p. 49.

20. Tauber, (2001) p. 6.

21. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 1964 reprint, (New York: Oxford University, 2000) p. 264.

22. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. VI, July 11, 1851, p. 300.

23. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, Intro by Michael Myer, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) p. 57.

24. Thoreau, "Thomas Carlyle and His Works," in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, (1975) p. 256.

25. Ryn, (1997) p. 185.

26. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Larzer Ziff, (New York: Penguin, 1982) p. 149.

27. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 4, July 5, 1840, p. 162, and in Henry David Thoreau, "Monday," in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, originally published 1849, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001) p. 77. From here on, referred to simply as *A Week*.

28. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*: *Excursions*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) p. 192.

29. Richardson, (1986) pp. 25–26.

30. Tauber, (2001) p. 172.

31. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. 1, July 1850, p. 44.

32. Henry David Thoreau, "Letter to H. G. O. Blake, August 9, 1850," in *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, ed. by Bradley P. Dean, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004) p. 60.

33. Using the words "imagination" and "intuition" interchangeably emphasizes the former's prerational nature and immediacy. While I could conceivably use only the word intuition instead of imagination, the latter term more effectively evokes the importance of creative works of imagination which are critical to giving intuition its content. Furthermore, the immediacy of intuition seems (incorrectly) to exempt it from qualitative distinctions, undermining the possibility that a "moral" or "idyllic" intuition could even exist. Because the criterion of an intuition/imagination's quality is

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dependent on reality, however, that prerational immediacy can still be evaluated based on its hold on life as it actually is. Intuition is not morally neutral, and the term "imagination" arguably captures this reality more effectively.

34. Ryn, (1997) p. 147.

35. A number of words fit what Ryn is communicating by using the word will. Among them he lists "desire, wish, aspiration, impulse, interest, inclination, passion." Ryn, (1997) p. 147.

36. Ryn, (1997) p. 148.

37. Ryn, (1997) p. 148.

38. Ryn, (1997) p. 16.

39. Ryn, (1997) p. 17.

40. Ryn, (1997) p. xix.

41. Ryn, (1997) p. 25.

42. Ryn, (1997) p. 25.

43. There is an important sense in which this moral good can be referred to as "transcendent." The word "transcendence," however, is a particularly problematic concept in the context of this study. It means something rather different for Ryn than it does for Thoreau and Emerson. For Ryn, there exists "an ethical imperative that transcends particular historical circumstances," but he does "not assume a pre-existing ideal reality, a universal model or plan for individual and society" (Ryn, 1997, p. xiii). His fear is that invoking knowledge of a transcendent, ideal order may provide a "spiritual sanction" for an ahistorical, abstract ideal which may claim a kind of absolute authority regardless of historical circumstances. For Ryn, "one of the valid meanings of transcendence is that goodness may be realized in forever new circumstances" (Ryn, 1997, p. xii).

44. Ryn, (1997) p. 26.

45. The perceptive reader will recognize that the foundation for the moral-idyllic distinction seems to be grounded in something akin to "Natural Law." In one sense this is true, but it depends on what one means by natural law. If, by natural law, we mean a kind of abstract, ahistorical set of principles accessible exclusively by means of reason, then the association between the theory of imagination and natural law breaks down. However, if by natural law we mean a universal moral foundation disclosed by history and concrete action, but elaborated by reason, then natural law seems to be more in line with this theory. See Claes G. Ryn, *A Common Human Ground: Universality and Particularity in a Multicultural World*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2003) p. 110.

46. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression & General Linguistic*, trans. by Douglas Ainslie, 1909 reprint, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995) p. 14.

47. Ryn, (1997) p. 148.

48. Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 1924 reprint, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979) p. 35.

49. Ryn, (1997) p. 26.

50. Babbitt, (1979) p. 36

51. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Larzer Ziff, (New York: Penguin, 1982) p. 98.

52. Ryn, (1997) p. xv.

53. Buell, (1995) p. 312.

54. Babbitt, (1979) p. 29.

55. Plato, of course, would object to such a reformulation as his hostility to the poets in *Republic* Book III and X, is rather explicit.

56. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, originally published 1952, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) p. 1.

57. See Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Vol. V: In Search of Order*, ed. by Ellis Sandoz in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 18, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2000) pp. 51–54.

58. Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 63.

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59. It is important to note that, in the way I am defining the word here, “rhetoric” is not pejorative. To say one is using “rhetoric” is simply to say that one is being more deliberate in the *way* they are saying what they are saying, consciously choosing particular tropes, techniques, etc. One may use rhetoric in the service of the truth or of a lie, but the intent is still persuasion and the art itself does not change.

60. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, trans. by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) p. 7.

61. Ellul, (1965) p. 6.

62. Ellul, (1965) p. 14.

63. Ellul, (1965) p. 25.

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Chapter Two

Imagination and Environmental Political Thought

Political theory historically focuses on the nature of man, his place in order (or disorder), his place in history, and on questions of morality, justice, property, rights, obligation, and law. Thoreau was no strict political theorist in this regard, but he did write about politics and continues to play a significant role in the history of American political thought. His reflections on the natural, nonhuman world, however, constitute his deepest and most original intellectual footprint. He was not a political or cultural environmentalist in the manner of later "Greens" or activists. The very label, "environmentalist," would not emerge until a century after his death. He did not leave an explicit political agenda in light of his musings on nature, and he was not a "proto-environmental political theorist." Even the word "environment" was new.[1] Nevertheless, Thoreau's imaginative vision of nature provided an inspirational cornerstone for later environmentalists to build on.

Environmentally prescient ideas and questions can be found as far back as Virgil and St. Francis of Assisi, but it is Thoreau who has become the cornerstone of what would become the environmental imagination.[2] John Muir, Arne Naess, Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, Roderick Nash, Edward Abbey, and David Brower—names synonymous with the tradition of Western environmental thought and politics—were all explicitly influenced by Thoreau's work. As an example, Rachel Carson, whose book, *Silent Spring*, was critical to the emergence of modern environmentalism, is said to have kept a copy of Thoreau's *Walden* by her bedside.[3] He has become something of a "patron saint," an environmental sage and an integral part of the intuitive vision that occupies contemporary environmental thought. If one is to understand the imagination that shapes American environmental politics, science, and policy today, one must account for Thoreau.

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Environmental politics is a remarkably complex subsection of political life, and Thoreau is by no means the only voice inspiring the underlying moral and philosophical assumptions of environmentalism. Nevertheless, by considering environmental politics and imagination more broadly, Thoreau's impact is impressive, and the moral-idyllic tension in which he lived was inherited by his later environmental readers.

TURNING TOWARD ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION

Reading and reflecting on Thoreau's work ignites several questions neglected in the history of Western political thought. For centuries, political questions revolved around man's relationship to the divine or to other humans and only occasionally to man's relationship to the natural, nonhuman world. "Nature" has always been a common word, and themes of man in, of, and against the nonhuman world are ubiquitous. There is little precedent, however, for the comprehensive way in which man's relationship to material nature was subjected to the broad investigation by Thoreau and others in the nineteenth century. Until then, the importance of the natural nonhuman world for politics was seldom acknowledged. Nature was a reservoir of resources and an obstacle to be overcome. With the emergence of industry and a movement toward urban life, a greater awareness developed of the nonhuman world's moral and spiritual importance. The alienation of man from the land provoked a sense of loss, as if a previously unacknowledged relationship between humans and nonhumans had been broken. The idea of a "return to nature," and the sense that such an experience could be "restorative," was relatively new. Humans began to question the extent to which they existed within an environment and whether they possessed it or it possessed them. How would this awareness fit within the context of religion or in light of the explosion of the scientific revolution? Could one claim to "love" the nonhuman world? What about concepts of private property and rights? Would these have to be revisited? The sense of loss and separation occurred at the level of imagination and became part of a distinctively "American" intuition and self-understanding. The United States may not have yet possessed its own unique literature, architecture, music, and art to rival European civilization, but it did have some of the most extraordinary landscapes and natural wonders ever seen. Recognition of this distinction inevitably made its way into a number of works of the imagination in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

Thoreau's work specifically addressed the physical and scientific aspects of man and nature and united it with man's quest for moral, spiritual, and social self-understanding. The possibility that the natural, nonhuman world might possess something akin to rights, that it could make moral demands, or that the fate of humans and nonhumans may be more interconnected than

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previously conceived called for significant changes in the way that ethics, beauty, liberty, and equality were considered. Thoreau's navigation of these possibilities was striking and relatively new in American thought.

This profound reorientation of Nature in relation to man was a necessary (though insufficient) element in the Western turn toward the possibility of environmental thought. Plants, animals, and the landscape were no longer viewed exclusively through the lens of an older tradition but through a romanticized perception of nonhumans' inherent value. This turn was not primarily a product of reconceptualization or the reform of scientific and philosophical reason. Instead, this reorientation was fundamentally a product of imagination. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century art and literature had begun to reimagine and re-present the nonhuman world and provided new concepts and visions to the West's self-understanding. Though Thoreau was one among many of those driving this turn, he continues to be among the most representative and influential.[4]

Much remains to be done, however, in reorienting the imagination to greater environmental awareness and effective care. As Lawrence Buell rightly observed, "If, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it."[5] Political theorists, however, have widely neglected Buell's prescient observation.

IMAGINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The role the imagination plays in environmental politics emerges in a number of ways, and may best be observed in some peculiarities of modern policy-making. In one sense, this seems counterintuitive. Would not environmental policy simply be the application of scientific knowledge to policy problems and questions? This view has recently been challenged in Robert Nelson's provocative book, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion vs. Environmental Religion*.[6] According to Nelson, and based on his own experience in the Office of Policy Analysis for the U.S. Department of Interior, modern arguments and differences regarding economic and environmental policy are less products of clashing rationality, data, and reason and more products of conflicting public theologies. Without appealing to explicitly religious assumptions, public arguments over economics and environmental issues are less guided by disagreement over science and more by implicit and explicit "spiritual values" which may or may not serve to interpret that science. While Nelson is to be commended for drawing attention to the spiritual and religious aspects of policy-making in the United States, narrowly focus-

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ing on "theology" may obscure the complexity and importance of his observations. Drawing on the work of the theologian, Paul Tillich, Nelson defines religion as "a person's way of framing his or her basic perception of the world and its meaning."[7] Such a broad definition would be much more compatible with the working understanding of *imagination*, though, and might ultimately account for the influence of religion *among* a number of other elements.

One of Nelson's best examples to illustrate the dynamics of economic and environmental "theologies" concerns the notion of "rewilding" or "restoring" the natural order. Among policy-makers and environmental advocates alike there is a belief that due to mankind's culpability in the creation of environmental *dis*order, that he is subsequently responsible for restoring the natural order to where it is supposed to be.[8] Two problems immediately present themselves though. First, as Nelson observes, those who call for such restoration find themselves in an important contradiction. They want "natural evolution to occur without human impact and control" only to turn around and "propose that current human actions should set the stage for future evolution."[9] Environmentalists also regularly criticize past efforts of scientific management and intervention. Why would *this* moment in history be different? Why would the sins of a past intervention not be repeated? Nelson sees no other explanation than an appeal to prerational spiritual values. There is a kind of faith that says, "That was then. We know better now."

A second problem is how to identify the natural order to be restored. What does a "rightly ordered" nature look like? In the context of the United States, some have suggested trying to acquire a kind of balance that preceded the arrival of European colonists. Immediately, though, one must cry foul at the blatant neglect of Native Americans, who did much to alter the landscape and intervene in nature in their own way. Then, even if one takes the question further and seeks an order prior to Native Americans, they will ultimately come up short on evidence or remarkably incomplete at best. Restoration to such a state is increasingly demonstrated as futile.[10] Still one need not go *that* far to maintain a similar principle of "rewilding." After all, even at the beginning of the twentieth century large tracts of North America remained unsettled and relatively free from human "interference." This is one reason why "The Forest Service has been searching actively for old photographs of forests prior to 1900." Though as one might expect, "such evidence inevitably is in short supply."[11] It would seem, like much in the idyllic imagination, that the "ideal wilderness" man is meant to restore, is little more than a dream.

For Nelson, such fundamentally flawed ideas of environmental policy are products of misguided theology, yet such "impossible dreams" are not mere products of religious reflection. They are first and foremost products of imagination. Indeed, why is religion more important in these manifestations

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of idyllic imagination than say, the paintings of Albert Bierstadt and the Hudson River School? Why not consider the poetry of Wordsworth, John Muir's nature writings or contemporary movies such as *Avatar*? Spirituality no doubt plays a role in all these things, but it is only a *part*. What Nelson has rightly recognized as a nonrational basis for economic and environmental policy and politics is less a product of religious departures from reality and more the manifestation of the idyllic imagination. Nelson asserts that tensions between economic and environmental "theologies" can only be resolved by better theology. The moral imagination, however, provides a much more comprehensive solution to the crises caused by idyllic imagination.[12]

IMAGINATION AND GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTALISM

Policy is not the only arena in which the importance of environmental imagination for politics emerges. In the grassroots efforts of environmental groups, the imagination plays a critical role in the success and failure of political mobilization, lobbying, and fundraising. Few have appreciated this importance as extensively, and to such great effect, as the influential environmental activist, David Brower (1912–2000), and Greenpeace.

Though John Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892, David Brower gave the organization the character and history for which it is most remembered. Brower is commonly considered among the most influential and effective environmentalists of the twentieth century.[13] Initially the organization was more of an elitist mountaineering and climbing club, and their objectives centered on enjoying the Sierra Mountains of California. Their focus then moved more toward environmental protection once David Brower became executive director in 1952.[14] He quoted Thoreau throughout his writings and speeches, especially the dictum that "in wildness is the preservation of the world." Thoreau was the capstone of environmentalism's philosophical and spiritual foundations, as Brower understood them, and he shared Thoreau's emphasis on the imagination.

Early in his career, Brower recognized the power of photographs, art, films, and stories to effectively lobby support for his various causes. He made videos of various excursions into the Western wilderness, narrating his work with considerable pathos. His rhetorical strategy helped move environmental questions from a primarily economic conversation to one of ethics. Brower was particularly successful at opposing the cutting down of redwood trees and the construction of dams, such as one proposed in the Grand Canyon. He became close friends with the influential American photographer, Ansel Adams. Together, Brower and Adams used dramatic pictures of landscapes and natural wonders to move Americans to political action. Their

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photos and writings appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout the country and had a particularly sympathetic audience from First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson and other influential figures.

Brower understood that the Sierra Club's success hinged less on their ability to acquire, disseminate, and apply the latest scientific research than the need to win over the "hearts" of people as voters and consumers. He needed to cultivate the kind of ethical and even spiritual intuition that was friendly to the Club's ideas and which would have significant consequences for democratic politics. Brower's video of King's Canyon, for example, was sent to Congress and helped solidify the area's status as a national park. His efforts at shaping the American imagination's concern for the environment were so effective that the Sierra Club's perennial opponent, the dam-building U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, began making their own promotional videos to counter Brower's. He used these opportunities to paint vivid pictures of environmental issues as black and white or, as Brower's 1957 Sierra Club Handbook explained, as a "campaign between men of vision and the cash register men."[15]

Though the efforts of Brower and other environmental leaders were significantly proactive, the desired change could often be slow. Despite his own reservations, Brower and other environmentalists knew compromise was often necessary. The impact of such compromise provoked a relatively small group of individuals to pursue a more radical environmental agenda and to defend ecological well-being directly and even violently if necessary. Among more radical environmental groups, few have been as visible and enduring as Greenpeace, and seldom has such an organization recognized the importance of imagination as deeply.

The group that would become Greenpeace emerged in Vancouver, Canada, in 1969 and had helped build an alliance between the ecology and antiwar movements. Inspired by Gandhi, they advocated more interventionist protests of various commercial activities perceived as harmful to the environment. One of their earliest excursions was a confrontation with the Russian whaling fleet in which Greenpeace members unsuccessfully tried to place themselves in between Russian harpoons and giant sperm whales. Greenpeace immediately recognized how powerful footage and photos of these kinds of confrontations could be for raising awareness and funds for environmental causes. They dramatized and documented environmental problems around the world and they did as much as they could to make their work public. Early in the organization's history, a leader named Bob Hunter suggested the widespread use of what he called "mindbombs," that is, "using simple images, delivered by media, that would 'explode in people's minds' and create a new understanding of the world."[16] Hunter spoke of Greenpeace's efforts as a "storming of the mind."[17] These "mindbombs" attracted

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widespread media attention and ultimately did much to shape an environmental imagination, as well as create, for better or worse, an intuition of what environmentalism as a movement is like.

Critics of David Brower and the leaders of Greenpeace may accuse them of being irrational or eccentric, but such objections fail to account for these environmentalists' keen sense of what moves and shapes human behavior and beliefs. The voters and consumers they hope to influence do not readily respond to (or even comprehend) abstract theorizing or a detailed scientific rationalism. They live by what they love and fear, and in accordance with their experiences. In this sense, Greenpeace might reconsider the term "mindbombs," and replace it with "mindseeds," slowly but surely nudging others toward environmentalism's cause.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND ECOCENTRISM

One way to conceive of what Brower and Greenpeace were doing, was attempting to move the environmental imagination from one characterized by anthropocentrism toward ecocentrism. This dichotomy is of considerable importance to Lawrence Buell, who has characterized crises of poor environmental policy, the success and failings of grassroots movements, and declining environmental well-being as a crisis of imagination. In his seminal work, *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell offers influential reflections which have subsequently sparked an entire subdiscipline of environmental literary studies, or "ecocriticism," and provoked a considerable awareness for how works of the imagination have both contributed to and resisted environmental disorder.[18]

Buell's goal is to elevate the importance of imagination for understanding environmental crises, and the content of his critical "tests" and pages and pages of examples reinforce the suggestion that the imagination plays just as important (if not more important) a role as science and economics in environmental thought and care. His tests and examples, however, betray a narrow view of the key tension that animates one's imagination. For Buell the tension is between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. If a text passes his tests, it is likely ecocentric, if the text fails, it is probably the former.

Anthropocentrism or homocentrism, for Buell, is the practice of placing humans at the center of the imagination. Humanity's interests are superior to those of the nonhuman world. What does he mean by "ecocentrism?" Buell adopts a modified definition of Timothy O'Riordan who writes that "Ecocentrism preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care; it argues for low impact technology (but is not antitechnological); it decries bigness and impersonality in all forms (but especially in the city); and demands a code of behavior that seeks permanence and stability based upon

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ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis."[19] Buell adds two additional points: "(1) that ecocentrism may in fact be antitechnological, and (2) that it need not adhere to a dogma of homeostasis."[20] It would seem, with this definition, that anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are not necessarily opposed to one another. The definition does not require the "dethroning" of man as the center of our imaginations *unless* it is assumed that anthropocentrism excludes the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care mentioned above. Yet even the most pessimistic accounts of human nature acknowledge that individuals are capable of great generosity, reverence, humility, and care. Why would ecocentrism be inherently responsible, for example?

Buell nevertheless sees the imaginative tension as a pull between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. These are not, however, just different ways of imaging the world but different moral or ethical dispositions. The broadening of the imagination's importance adds weight to his claim that environmental crises go hand in hand with crises of the imagination. The problem is that, for Buell, neither side of this tension nor the imagination itself need be grounded in reality. Unlike the working tension of idyllic and moral imagination, which requires an appeal to reality, Buell's tension focuses on the extent to which one cares for the environment and prioritizes their life around ecological well-being. This focus on care shows that Buell appreciates the role of will in the overall framework of environmental imagination, but his premises for the tension he works with are prejudiced toward a particular abstract idea and not toward historical circumstances. Buell seems unaware that even if an ecocentric disposition is achieved, the corresponding love or care may not be beneficial for the human or nonhuman world. Indeed, it appears as though the idea of the environment and the sentiment of *care* are more important than the historical and ethical reality of the human–nonhuman relationship. Both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are capable of tempting man away from his hold on life. This cannot be the *key* tension if reality and moral *efficacy* are to be included in how one evaluates the quality of the imagination as distinguished from ideologies and worldviews.

Identifying the imaginative tension in environmental thought as between the idyllic and moral imaginations yields a much more fruitful analysis and consideration of why Buell is right in saying that environmental crises are crises of imagination. How, for example, would Buell's ecocentric-anthropocentric tension expose the fundamental contradictions and problems involved with the "rewilding" idea mentioned earlier? One would think, for example, that those championing the restoration of primitive wilderness were animated by ecocentric imaginations and virtues. Yet, these same people ultimately propose an anthropocentric solution to the problem by requiring humans to intervene. How are restorative actions "reverent" toward nature? How are they promoting permanence and stability? The anthropocentric-ecocentric

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tension can offer a way to distinguish different sets of values but not a way to distinguish how a given imagination corresponds to the complex historical reality of environmental problems. A truly moral imagination, in addition to offering its own positive recommendations, would likely recognize the contradictions in the notion of “rewilding” long before millions would be spent attempting to come up with an idealistic restorative policy or primitive baseline. The idyllic imagination would have probably taken rewilding even farther than current restorative efforts, encouraging a radical return to a primitive wilderness, the reality of which, even Thoreau admits, is little more than a dream. The moral imagination, of course, does not eschew human intervention in the environment, nor does it reject all ecocentric values. Indeed, of all the virtues that characterize the moral imagination, humility is the most important.[21] But the moral imagination wants to approach environmental crises from the perspective of reality, not fantasy.

The environmental imagination is more than simply a way of imaging or representing the natural nonhuman world. While the historical facts of nature’s interconnectedness and value and scientific descriptions of nature are readily available, these elements are not self-interpreting. The facts are also inescapably subjective and anthropocentric. Awareness of them does not automatically lend itself to environmentally beneficial behaviors. As the efforts of David Brower and Greenpeace demonstrate, an appreciation of the will and its interplay with imagination is necessary for a fuller examination of environmental imagination. Thoreau did much to re-present and reimage the natural, nonhuman world, but did he offer a corresponding intuition of morality, politics, and human nature that lends itself to a more efficacious environmental ethics and politics? Did he exemplify the kind of philosophical reason consistent with the moral environmental imagination? Environmental politics and policy will continue to suffer from the “doublethink” Buell describes, from sentimental environmentalism, and will be tempted toward the more ideological policies and misplaced spirituality outlined by Nelson, without a corresponding moral environmental imagination to pull it back from the brink.

THOREAU AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Thoreau’s imagination of the natural, nonhuman world never explicitly connects politics to his intercourse with nature. His disgust with politics drives him more and more toward nature and away from society, which is why some have characterized Thoreau’s legacy for environmentalists as apolitical and incomplete.[22] In the century after his death, Thoreau’s place in American culture was still in question, but modern environmentalists found in him a relatable, imaginative vision. “What the greens found in Thoreau was an

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ethical gesture and a romanticism that deeply satisfied them." William Chaloupka observes, "The Earth Day generation was drawn to Thoreau by his wilderness values and a spiritualism propelled by landscapes. As Earth day greens responded to Thoreau's integrity, independence, and alternativeness to nature, they were also willing to embrace a predecessor who had rejected the American polity and whose political views were often immature and even contradictory."[23]

Thoreau scholarship in the mid-twentieth century was just beginning to blossom into the "cottage-industry" it is today. There was no single, authoritative interpretation, so it became a custom for Thoreau scholars to speak of "several Thoreaus." In a way, there was no immediately obvious Thoreau, among all the various iterations, that was clearly relevant and beneficial to environmentalists.

One problem, as critics were quick to point out, was that environmentalism, unlike Thoreau, was elitist. Chaloupka describes environmentalists of the 1960s and 1970s as exhibiting a "nervousness about the American middle class . . . encouraged by a cultural conservatism within the ostensibly progressive green identity."[24] The greens were (and, in many ways, still are) a movement without a consistent self-understanding. While they willingly borrowed from cultural conservatism by fighting with labor unions and being suspicious of change and the growth of technology, they also claimed to be progressive in their economics and preference for democracy. Indeed, were it not for Republicans' historical alliances with business interests, the greens may have come to associate more with the American Right.[25] This complicated identity has frustrated environmentalists' efforts as these seemingly contradictory impulses of being both radical and conservative opened it up to self-inflicted wounds and successful criticism from outside. By claiming to "speak for nature," environmentalists thought they could, like Thoreau, skip over the more difficult political questions. Thoreau and the environmentalists, in other words, sought to solve a political problem without politics.

Bob Pepperman Taylor observes a similar problem with Thoreau's environmental legacy, distinguishing Thoreau's "pastoral" and seemingly apolitical disposition from the more "progressive" standpoint of Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service.[26] Pepperman Taylor does not find in Thoreau the thoroughly apolitical disposition that Chaloupka observes. Thoreau's civil disobedience, public criticism, and efforts at reform are meant both as an individual resistance and as an example for others. He also asserted the educative and moral influence which Nature might provide to the reform of the country.[27] Yet compared to the practical, scientific, and administrative disposition of Pinchot, Thoreau's pastoral tradition had little to offer concrete, everyday politics and policy.

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Pepperman Taylor emphasizes the pastoral-progressive tension as the defining characteristic of the history of American environmental thought and politics. Unlike Chaloupka, who sees little in common between the "Earth Day generation" of 1970s environmentalism and the turn-of-the twentieth century conservationists like John Muir and Pinchot, Pepperman Taylor identifies a much older and overlooked tradition that adds greater historical depth to environmental thought. This, in turn, resists the tendency to focus on the alternative tension associated between anthropocentric and ecocentric imaginations that is associated with Buell. For Buell and others, the deeply anthropocentric disposition of more traditional environmental thinkers distinguishes them from the later, more ecocentric environmentalists who discover Thoreau in the mid-twentieth century. Pepperman Taylor rightly sees this distinction as less illuminating for political theory since it ignores the crucial questions that have animated environmental politics for the past century; namely questions "over the appropriate understanding of America political life and values and the role of nature in this political life."[28] Both Thoreau and Pinchot have something to offer environmental politics and both share similar views of nature in the abstract, but they differ in how to incorporate those views into politics and governance.

While Pepperman Taylor moves the conversation away from the anthropocentric-ecocentric tension and toward concrete politics, he does not ask how views of nature or the imagination of nature could have a profound impact within pastoral-progressive traditions. Both Thoreau and Pinchot struggle between a moral and idyllic imagination and that tension has a greater impact on their political influence than their often-overlapping traditions.

Thoreau does not offer policy prescriptions and political principles regarding the preservation of nature as explicitly as someone like Pinchot, but Pepperman Taylor is right to recognize in Thoreau a more politically significant legacy. Still, Chaloupka recognizes that Thoreau did offer both a basis for a more ecologically sensitive culture and a "level of self-certainty" and "adamance" that environmentalists needed to assert that they "spoke for nature."[29] The problem was that the "the environmental movement tended toward absolutism and utopianism, and in both respects, Thoreau's moralism was helpful."[30] Yet there is no reason to believe that such moralism, while politically problematic and potentially ideological, might not have profound consequences for democratic politics and public policy. According to Chaloupka, "the present dilemma of American environmentalism might well be understood as the long-delayed consequences of having been founded on such an odd and, finally, deficient political model."[31] Ultimately, environmentalism had to adopt more concrete political ideas and attach the latest scientific research to the romantic legacy inherited from Thoreau. Chaloupka

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overlooks the fact that these additional ideas and the science itself may be animated by the same problematic imagination which modern environmentalists struggled with upon "rediscovering" Thoreau.

NOTES

1. The first recorded use of the word "environment" in the manner popular today, and in relation to the natural world, was provided by Thomas Carlyle in his essay, "Goethe," *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, new ed., (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873) p. 85. Article first published in *Foreign Review*, III, (July 1828) pp.80–127.
2. See Buell, (1995). Especially Chapters 4, 10, 11, and 12. It is important to note that use of the term "environmental imagination" is not meant to denote a particular faculty or a quality of imagination. It is better understood as a "theme" with which the imagination is preoccupied.
3. Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature*, reprint 1997, (New York: Mariner Books, 2009) p. 509n7.
4. Ecologist Daniel Botkin, for example, describes Thoreau as "an icon of environmentalism," and his "life as a metaphor for the search for a path to nature-knowledge and a resolution of the questions inherent in humanity's relationship with the rest of the natural world." Thoreau is offered "as one of the fathers of modern environmentalism" and "the protagonist for wildness." Daniel B. Botkin, *No Man's Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature*, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001) pp. xvi, 13, 121.
5. Buell, (1995) p. 2.
6. Robert H. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion vs. Environmental Religion in Contemporary America*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).
7. Nelson, (2010) p. x.
8. "In 1999, Connie Barlow, an advocate for environmental causes, declared that the 're-wilding [of nature] must be undertaken because, next to outright species extinctions, the most abhorrent outcome—the greatest crime against creation—human kind might effect would be survival for surviving lineages [of plant and animal species] to skew their future evolution substantially in response to us.' She acknowledged that the human species in this case would not be acting according to Darwin's model of competitive struggle. Rather, it was based on a 'strong ethical, even religious appeal.'" Nelson, (2010) p. 220.
9. Nelson, (2010) p. 222.
10. The belief that the Americas, prior to Columbus's arrival in 1492, was an unsettled wilderness has been challenged extensively by Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, 2nd ed., (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). Mann argues that Native American civilizations at the time of Columbus's arrival were much larger, more sophisticated, and had a more extensive impact on the natural environment than is commonly believed or taught.
11. Nelson, (2010) p. 229.
12. This is not to say that theology does not have a place—even a critical place—in the discussion of environmental imagination. But it is limited to a particular set of insights, and does not account for the totality of the problem.
13. Bill McKibben, himself a major force in modern environmentalism, refers to Brower as "The most important environmental leader of the second half of the twentieth century." Bill McKibben, ed., *American Earth: Environmental Writing since Thoreau*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc., 2008) p. 554.
14. Brower would later be forced out of the Sierra Club by the board who found his rejection of compromise as detrimental to the organization. He would then found Friends of the Earth and the Earth Island Institute before eventually returning as a board member for the Sierra Club in 1983.
15. David R. Brower, ed., *The Sierra Club Handbook*, (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1957) p. iii.

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16. Rex Weyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Journalists, Ecologists and Visionaries Changed the World,* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2004) p. 73.
17. Weyler, (2004) p. 76.
18. See Jay Parini, "The Greening of the Humanities," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1995.
19. Timothy O'Riordan, *Environmentalism*, 2nd ed., (London: Pion, 1981) p. 1.
20. Buell, (1995) p. 425.
21. Humility, understood as deference to a higher will and an allegiance to standards, is central to the thought of Claes Ryn and Irving Babbitt and critical to the moral imagination. Babbitt quotes Edmund Burke approvingly that "True humility, the basis of the Christian system, is the low but deep and firm foundation of all real virtue." Significantly, and especially for a study of Thoreau, Babbitt also asserts that "it is plainly not easy to be at once humble and self-reliant." Babbitt, (1979) pp. 133, 192.
22. William Chaloupka. "Thoreau's Apolitical Legacy for American Environmentalism." in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Jack Turner, (Lexington, KY: University, of Kentucky, 2009) p. 205.
23. Chaloupka, (2009) p. 206.
24. Chaloupka, (2009) p. 212.
25. Chaloupka, (2009) p. 213.
26. Bob Pepperman Taylor, *Our Limits Transgressed: Environmental Political Thought in America*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1992) p. 4.
27. Pepperman Taylor, (1992) p. 15.
28. Pepperman Taylor, (1992) p. 26.
29. Chaloupka, (2009) p. 219.
30. Chaloupka, (2009) p. 220.
31. Chaloupka, (2009) pp. 222–23.

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II

Thoreau’s Political Thought

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Chapter Three

Life with Principle: Thoreau and Political Morality

A theory of imagination, when employed as an analytical framework, encourages reading a text and studying historical authors in a broad, interdisciplinary setting. Even if an author writes in multiple genres, they do not become a different person each time they begin to compose a given work. To analyze Thoreau's imagination, then, this study considers his corpus as a whole, and as providing a unified—but not a uniform—picture of who he was and what he thought. In other words, Thoreau the "nature lover" of *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* ought not to be divorced from the Thoreau of "Resistance to Civil Government" or his later, more scientific writings. There is development, change, and contradiction in his work, yes, but these shifts and problems are part of his legacy. Furthermore, the moral-idyllic tension seen in Thoreau's more explicit nature writings also emerge in, and may originate in, the same tension animating his thoughts on morality, friendship, community, freedom, law, and slavery.

"Our whole life is startlingly moral," Thoreau writes. "There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails."[1] Moral reflections shaped the content of most of his works, what he read, his time spent at Walden, and his canoe trip down the Concord and Merrimack rivers. Moral questions dominate his writings on politics and slavery, and they even appear in his late natural history writings. Whether assumed or delineated, implied or pronounced, Thoreau's sense of what was right, wrong, good, true, and beautiful was regularly on display. This emphasis on morality provided considerable depth to his reflections and ensured his perennial ability to connect to a great diversity of readers and influence *their* imaginations.

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Thoreau's imagination of morality and human nature has profound implications for politics. Thoreau lived within a number of tensions in light of his views on persons especially: balancing a need for friendship with a desire for autonomy, admiring the Native Americans while resisting a temptation toward an idyllic savagism and abhorring slavery while not always clearly articulating his reasons. Thoreau's imaginative tension was even more pronounced as he wrestled with what he perceived as a conflict between abstract "Right" and "principle" with historical circumstances, politics, and "expedience." Illustrative of these tensions is an enduring concern with human freedom and friendship as critical to moral philosophy. Thoreau believed that morality requires conformity to a preexisting standard or expectation. Given his understanding of human nature, how would Thoreau square his moral philosophy with the freedom he treasured? How would Thoreau bring all this to bear on questions of politics? Politics and morality often seem to mix as well as oil and water, but Thoreau knew that this was no reason to artificially separate two aspects of life that ultimately confront one another. Indeed, politics considered separately from morality was the root of Thoreau's infamous disdain for politics. Nowhere is this tension more evident than in his more polemical essays on slavery and in his most famous and influential political work, "Resistance to Civil Government." But in order to understand Thoreau's broader imagination of morality, a closer look at his intuition of the human condition will be helpful.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE HUMAN

The great political thinkers of modernity outlined their fundamental assumptions on humanity's moral disposition in order to ground their political philosophy and prescriptions. Ranging from the more pessimistic accounts of Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "naturally good" individual, what one imagines as fundamental to the human condition is critical to their political philosophy. While Thoreau may have encountered these great figures of modern political thought, the most important context for his imagination of human nature, was his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Clearly identifying Emerson's "political anthropology" is no easy task given his prolific literary output. He was not always philosophically consistent, but he was arguably more explicit and systematic than Thoreau. A few brief observations on Emerson's core thoughts in this regard will be helpful. Emerson, more so than Thoreau, was indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Though he never articulated an anthropological narrative like that of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* in *The Basic Political Writings*, Emerson did operate under similar assumptions. There was, for Emerson, an

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ideal and savage stage in the history of man. Humans cannot return to this stage, but its historical reality is fundamental to human self-understanding. Of particular importance is the need to achieve the ideal of self-reliance, which man did not need to forfeit in the transition from his savage origins to civilization. Emerson claimed to identify within each man a "divine-self" on which a person is to rely as much as possible. This reliance and divinity was to correspond with a fierce independence that was, in part, a recognition, according to Russell Goodman, "that there is a self already formed on which we may rely. The 'self' on which we are to 'rely' is, in contrast, the original self that we are in the process of creating. Such a self, to use a phrase from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, 'becomes what it is.'"[2]

Emerson channeled (not necessarily accurately) the extensive influence of Immanuel Kant and encouraged human beings to recognize that *true* genius is "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men."[3] Emerson's "genius" eschews imitation and envy and learns to trust himself. As Emerson argues, "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of your own mind."[4] In a sense, human liberty comes from a conformity to a self that has already been given, so there is no need to deliberately conform to external influences. Thankfully, Emerson explains, "no man can violate his nature."[5] And that nature is of infinite worth and entirely different from that of anyone else. Does this mean that Emerson embraces a radical subjectivism with little or no sense of unity or space for a legitimate government? According to James H. Read, Emerson's critics have accused him of promoting a kind of anarchy, but he "never claimed that a self-reliant individual possessed unlimited freedom, or that self-reliance was inconsistent with fulfilling one's duties to others. The self-reliant human being recognizes his or her own limitations . . . but grasps that traditions, institutions, and received opinions are at least equally limited and imperfect."[6]

There is room for politics and society in Emerson's thought, but not at the expense of individual autonomy or in the service of conformity. This is reminiscent, in a sense, of Rousseau's "general will" in which man only obeys those laws which he would otherwise have imposed on himself. The self-reliant man, like Rousseau's citizens under the "Social Contract," only conforms to that which is no different from himself. A government remains necessary, not to enforce a kind of conformity, but to preserve an environment compatible with the realization of individual autonomy.[7]

The problem of conformity for Emerson was not that it promoted a fundamental disunity, though. For Emerson, as well as for Thoreau, human individuality and autonomy was a necessary outgrowth of the infinitely complex

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unity underlying all of life. Emerson describes this unity as being rooted in the "Over-Soul," defined as the one, ahistorical, permanent, and "most real" part of existence.

Emerson's belief in a greater reality present in the world of ideas, his rejection of the doctrine of original sin, and his assertion of man's "divine self," all place him in the tradition of related European thinkers such as Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Consequently, when he observes something of a "dual nature" in man he is less inclined to emphasize conflicting imaginations or tensions between higher and lower moral potentialities. Instead, as Len Gougeon explains: "Emerson believed that human nature possesses a dual aspect, basically material and ethereal. Every person has the capacity to operate in both of these realms."[8]

Thoreau, like Emerson, embraced the notion that human nature and Nature generally are fundamentally permanent and unchanging. Such a disposition allows for greater appreciation of the present. Longing for a bygone golden age and heroes, as did several of Thoreau's contemporaries, distracts from the ability to see *today* as a golden age, and the people in one's more immediate proximity (especially one's self) as a potential hero.[9] Yet Thoreau also believed that reading the texts of ancient Greece and Rome (in their original language) recovered this heroic sentiment and imagination. Modern writers simply cannot inspire what the classics have kindled. "For what are the classics," he asks, "but the noblest recorded thoughts of man?"[10]

Thoreau's sympathies for the ancients may explain his departure from paradigms of modern political thought. The central preoccupation for Thoreau's conception of human nature is based less on a "State of Nature" or sweeping generalizations like those of Machiavelli and Hobbes.[11] Instead, Thoreau sought to recover and attune himself to a universal humanity and to the kind of moral heroism represented by the ancients. For Thoreau, then, the primary question is the individual or society's relationship to "Right." Man is capable of good and evil, and he is free and accountable relative to this Right.[12] Thoreau recognizes, in other words, a struggle in humans between higher and lower potentialities, or between good and evil. He writes in his *Journal* that "No faculty in man was created with a useless or sinister intent; in no respect can he be wholly bad, but the worst passions have their root in the best—as anger, for instance, may be only a perverted sense of wrong which yet retains some traces of its origin."[13] In a footnote added later, he argues that our virtues can be the source of our vices: "We must consider war and slavery, with many other institutions and even the best existing governments, notwithstanding their apparent advantages, as the abortive rudiments of nobler institutions such as distinguish man in his savage and half-civilized state."[14]

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There is a temptation for Thoreau to view evil merely as the privation of good or as a kind of unreality. Elsewhere, evil appears to be defined as the ignorance and rejection of principle,[15] or as a way to describe the perennial mass die offs of suckers in the spring.[16] In this sense, and in his opposition to slavery and the Mexican-American War, evil has a very clear, concrete reality. Thoreau also shares with Emerson and Rousseau the belief that Western civilization and government tends to be inferior to the "institutions" of the "savage and half-civilized state." In other words, Thoreau's notion of evil is less rooted in corresponding concepts of "sin" or "illegality," and favors more subjective and often ahistorical foundations. It is also unlikely that Thoreau would have embraced the doctrine of original sin,[17] which Emerson also rejected.[18] Yet he did not go so far as Rousseau and deny the presence of competing moral potentialities within man.[19] There are considerable streaks of pessimism, misanthropy, and frustration with other individuals in Thoreau's work, but he also shares much of this pessimism regarding his *own* ability to live up to his moral expectations.[20] As with the rest of Thoreau's thought, there is a tension here between the unreality of evil and its very real presence in the endurance of slavery and American imperialism.

THE ORDER OF THE SOUL

Given Thoreau's imagination of good and evil, what does he establish as the criteria of moral and immoral behavior? Thoreau's moral and political thought centers around an appeal to what he calls Right, or to the "Higher Law." This Right serves as a fixed moral standard, and is not subject to historical particularity, prudence, or compromise. It is abstract, universal, and absolute. Man's moral quality—his or her character—is evaluated on one's attunement to Right and by fidelity to the Higher Law.[21]

Right or Truth, as intuited by Thoreau, tends to be conceived as ahistorical and abstract. He writes that, "Truth is not exalted, but rather degraded and soiled by contact with humanity. We may not conform ourselves to any mortal patter, but should conform our every act and thought to Truth."[22] While he does favor the idyllic imagination in this regard, the moral imagination has a way of pulling him from the brink. "Truth," he continues, "is that whole of which Virtue, Justice, Benevolence, and the like are parts, the manifestations; she includes and runs through them all. She is continually revealing herself."[23] At first, Thoreau exhibits a kind of Docetism. The universal Truth cannot help but be corrupted by its incarnation in human life, nor can it accommodate historical circumstances. When he defines Truth as "the whole," though, there is a sense in which Truth's universality is revealed through its concrete manifestations of virtue, justice, and benevolence. Thoreau even admits that "She," or "Truth," is "constantly revealing herself"—a

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phrase reminiscent of Babbitt's "oneness that is always changing." In a strikingly similar vein from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he writes "We are independent of the change we detect."[24] The moral-idyllic tension endures as he cannot entirely abstract himself from the particulars of history and humanity. Human beings still detect the change they live in. Truth may reveal herself in *spite* of the particular, but she reveals herself in the particular nonetheless. There is something above the flux that is abstract and available for universal application, but the flux is still fully real.[25]

This appeal to the abstract as being more universally applicable is again reminiscent of Kant's categorical imperative or Rousseau's general will, but such a view of truth could be taken to an unfortunate political extreme. Thoreau would have the seeker of Truth be apolitical and pursue that which is abstract enough to paradoxically retain its universal application. In an attempt to be as practical as possible, Thoreau neglects the very existence in which Truth is revealing itself. The abstract moral right he asserts is anathema to the practicality he confronts. While Thoreau's objections to slavery may violate this aversion, he nevertheless writes in *A Week*:

> To one who habitually endeavors to contemplate the true state of things, the political state can hardly be said to have any existence whatever. It is unreal, incredible and insignificant to him, and for him to endeavor to exact the truth from such lean material is like making sugar from linen rags when sugar cane may be had. Generally speaking, the political news, whether domestic or foreign, might be written to-day for the next ten years, with sufficient accuracy.[26]

The "political," narrowly (but never explicitly) defined, is almost wholly removed from the Truth. Politics is so concrete, so changeable and so historical that it could not possibly possess the reality that Thoreau's adherence to Right demands. He would prefer to simply ignore politics altogether. Thankfully, he possessed just enough moral imagination to not abandon political questions entirely—a fact demonstrated most clearly by his public opposition to slavery and the Mexican-American War.

Needless to say, Thoreau's "political anti-politics" owes much to his reflection on morality, right, the good, moral virtue, and so forth. Most importantly, Thoreau also views the tension between the highest and lowest in man as the source of the same tension in government. This tension emerges in part due to Thoreau's preference for classical authors over more modern thinkers.[27] For Plato, the "order of the soul" was the foundation for the "order of the polis." For Aristotle, the Good Man and the Good Citizen were synonymous. For Thoreau, the virtues and vices of society both originated in the character of individuals.

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An example of his concern for the "order of the soul" and its influence on the "order of the polis" appears in the essay, "Paradise (To Be) Regained" (1843). Thoreau reviews a utopian prescription by J. A. Etzler entitled, The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery. An Address to all Intelligent Men (1833). Etzler essentially calls for perfection of the world and human life by means of technology.[28] For Etzler, the order of the soul is irrelevant—if the soul exists at all. Thoreau specifically finds Etzler's faith in machines to be misplaced, and he judges Etzler's subsequent disregard for the individual to be reprehensible. Etzler also views the cessation of the need for human labor as the great appeal of his vision. Once paradise is achieved, man may relax and enjoy the perfection that machines have provided. Thoreau, however, cannot imagine how the abandonment of labor would ever be paradise. Labor for its own sake or labor as enslavement are equally undesirable, but labor itself is ultimately both unavoidable and potentially beneficial.[29] While living at Walden Pond, he found labor—especially the cultivation of some beans– to be an almost spiritual exercise, and he regularly took long afternoon walks between writing. He also worked extensively in his family's pencil business, helping to craft and sell their product. He even pioneered new methods of manufacturing pencils, engineered new devices, and researched improvements in graphite. Thoreau, most importantly, however, cannot endorse Etzler's notion that the "outward improvements" provided by machines would negate the need for inner reform. "Undoubtedly," Thoreau writes, "if we were to reform this outward life truly and thoroughly, we should find no duty of the inner omitted . . . a moral reform must take place first, and then the necessity of the other will be superseded, and we shall sail and plough by its force alone."[30] Etzler's utopia, like those attempted by Thoreau's contemporaries at Fruitlands and Brook Farm, fails because it ignores the reform of the individual and neglects to consider humans as they are.

THE ORDER OF LOVE

Another aspect of Thoreau's moral imagination is his recognition of the power of passion and love as ordering forces. Despite claiming a preference for an abstract Right, what humans desire has the potential to pull them back to concrete, historical circumstances. While at Harvard, Thoreau wrote that "Each one is, for the most part, under the influence of some ruling passion, and almost invariably possesses a taste for some particular pursuit. This pursuit, this object of all one's wishes, and end of all his endeavors, has great influence with his fellow men in determining his character."[31] In D. H. Lawrence's words, "We live by what we thrill to." Or, to borrow a phrase from James K. A. Smith, humans are "desiring, imaginative animals."[32] Else-

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where, Thoreau writes that "I can express only the thought which I *love* to express."[33] Who or what one "loves" is the ordering principle in contrast to an order of reason and abstract rationality.[34] What one loves has the potential to ground man, in Thoreau's words, in a "particular pursuit" or, alternatively, in particular persons, places, and things.

Another key element of the aforementioned Harvard essay is the importance of the "true patriot"—Thoreau's shorthand for an uncompromising and selfless seeker of the common good. This individual does not ignore the thoughts of others but makes a conscious effort to distinguish himself and to carefully resist being defined by another. As Thoreau writes a month later:

> Most of us are apt to neglect the study of our own characters, thoughts, and feelings, and for the purpose of forming our own minds, look to others, who should merely be considered as different editions of the same great work. To be sure, it would be well for us to examine the various copies, that we might detect any errors, but yet, it would be foolish for one to borrow a work which he possessed himself, but had not perused.[35]

Thoreau lays the groundwork for his lifelong preoccupation with autonomy, but he also introduces his conception of persons as "different editions of the same great work." Human individuality participates in a unity with humanity, and by calling each person a different "edition," and not a copy, he seems to appreciate the creative potential of imitation. Humans discover their place within a universal humanity and community by actualizing their individuality instead of suppressing it. This early reflection by Thoreau is among the best examples of his moral imagination; in which man is neither merely abstract nor fully concrete, but a synthesis of the universal and particular.

A further example of Thoreau's moral imagination qualifies the pursuit of autonomy and individuality:

> I would not, by any means, have it understood that we are to neglect the advice of our friends, and ask another's opinion, as many do, merely to refute it, without considering that it is given at our own request, and that therefore we are to consider it a favor; but the majority of mankind are too easily induced to follow any course which accords with the opinion of the world.[36]

A few months later again he writes, "He who is dependent upon himself alone for his enjoyments—who finds all he wants within himself, is really independent; for to look to others for that which is the object of every man's pursuit, is to live in a state of perpetual trust and reliance."[37] These passages reflect an individuality that is not at odds with family and community life and does not conflict with moral autonomy. Yet over the next two decades, Thoreau would come to the opposite conclusion in *Walden*, writing that "I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first

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syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors."[38] Thoreau could resist or embrace advice and influence from the same person, maintaining his individual character, but still gleaning what he could from others.

Thoreau has not yet articulated, while at Harvard, the importance of Right as the ordering element of his moral understanding, but given his preoccupation with individuality and autonomy, a problem already emerges. This Right would conceivably demand the cultivation of more than moral unity within society. It would require *uniformity* as well. Would this uniformity ultimately undermine individuality? Rousseau contemplated this problem in regards to the "General Will," which possesses a similar universality to Thoreau's Right. The answer for Rousseau was "that whoever refuses to obey the general will, will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free."[39] Conformity to Right is chosen over and above individuality which may undermine the uniformity of the general will. Thoreau at this point, however, is either unaware of the problem with conformity or unwilling to take it that far. In a passage reminiscent of John Stuart Mill's warning about the "tyranny of the majority," Thoreau writes, "If then we find a certain Few standing aloof from the multitude—not allowing themselves to be carried along by the current of Popular feeling, we may fairly conclude that they have good reason for so doing."[40] This is not the same as favoring individuality over and above Right but, rather, above popular opinion. Thoreau did not hold a similar view in regards to slavery.

Thoreau intuited the world with a constant attention to moral questions. Living in the tension between the moral and idyllic imagination, he struggled to reconcile his abstract, ahistorical Right with the concrete, historical circumstances of politics. He wrestled with misanthropy, pantheism, the reality of good and evil, moral excellence by means of reason or religion, and so on. As Heinz Eulau observed, "Thoreau's individualism could not possibly find practical application. The moral and the morally real were at odds."[41] Though given more toward the idyllic than the moral, the tension shaped his attitude toward politics and the community around him more so than his affinity for one side.

To even have the opportunity for the moral-idyllic struggle, one must, in Thoreau's view, be free. What does it mean to be free? For Thoreau, freedom was primarily "negative," in that it involved the removal of obstacles and inhibitions to one's moral autonomy. Yet he was also animated by a positive concept of freedom as an attunement to Right. Self-reform and fidelity to the Higher Laws required freedom. But politics and community also require an understanding of friendship and society. Who are we relative to others and how do we live with one another? Freedom and friendship are critical themes in Thoreau's legacy, and they are fruitful areas to witness the tension between the idyllic and moral imagination.

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NOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau, "Higher Laws," *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) p. 266.

2. Russell Goodman, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2011), first published Thursday, January 3, 2002; substantive revision Wednesday, August 18, 2010. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/emerson/

3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Nature and Selected Essays*, (New York: Penguin, 2003) p. 175.

4. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," (2003) p. 178.

5. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," (2003) p. 183.

6. James H. Read, "The Limits of Self-Reliance: Emerson, Slavery, and Abolition," in *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Alan M. Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk, (Louisville, KY: University of Kentucky, 2011) p. 152.

7. See Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Emerson: The All and the One," in Levine and Malachuk, (2011) p. 49.

8. Gougeon continues, observing that, "In a letter to his younger brother . . . Emerson makes the distinction between the Understanding and the Reason explicit. . . . 'Now that I have used the words,' he says, 'let me ask you to draw the distinction of Milton[,] Coleridge & the Germans between Reason & Understanding. . . . Reason is the highest faculty of the soul—what we mean often by the soul itself; it never reasons, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision.' On the other hand, 'the Understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives, adds, argues, near sighted but strong-sighted, dwelling in the present the expedient the customary . . . 'Reason,' he says, 'is potentially perfect in every man—Understanding in different degrees of strength.'" Len Gougeon, "Emerson, Self-Reliance, and the Politics of Democracy," in Levine and Malachuk, (2011) pp. 186–87.

9. Richardson, (1986) pp. 25–26.

10. Thoreau, "Reading," *Walden*, pp. 146–47.

11. This reading contrasts with Philip Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom: Autobiography and American Political Thought*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1987). For Abbott, Thoreau is primarily preoccupied with a romantic utopia, or a prepolitical society and alternative order much like Rousseau's state of nature (though Abbott doesn't mention Rousseau). Abbott sees it more as a Lockean "state of perfect freedom," but his reading of both Locke and Thoreau is questionable. For Thoreau, there is no evidence that he intends for the freedom he describes to operate, like other state-of-nature formulations, as an explanation for some kind of legal, political, and social order.

12. He writes, for example, that "Man is the artificer of his own happiness. Let him beware how he complains of the disposition of circumstances, for it is his own disposition he blames." Thoreau, *Journal*, (1906) vol. I, ch. 2, January 21, 1838, p. 25. Thoreau also acknowledges his own imperfections. In his *Journal* on Feb. 10th, 1852, Thoreau writes "Now if there are any who think that I am vainglorious, that I set myself up above others and crow over their low estate, let me tell them that I could tell a pitiful story respecting myself as well as them, if my spirits held out to do it; I could encourage them with a sufficient list of failures, and could flow as humbly as the very gutters themselves; I could enumerate a list of as rank offenses as ever reached the nostrils of heaven; that I think worse of myself than they can possibly think of me, being better acquainted, with the man. I put the best face on the matter. I will tell them this secret, if they will not tell it to anybody else." *Journal*, (1906) vol. III, ch. 5, p. 293.

13. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 1, December 12, 1837, p. 16.

14. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 1, December 12, 1837, p. 16.

15. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. VI, ch. 7, June 16, 1854, p. 358.

16. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. IX, ch. 8, March 28, 1857, pp. 309–10. Suckers are a species of freshwater fish.

17. I am unaware of any instance in which Thoreau specifically discusses "original sin." He does briefly mention sin in his journal, writing, "Sin, I am sure, is not in overt acts or, indeed, in acts of any kind, but is in proportion to the time which has come behind us and displaced

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eternity—that degree to which our elements are mixed with the elements of the world. The whole duty of life is contained in the question how to respire and aspire both at once." *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 5, December 26, 1841, p. 300.

18. Russell Kirk observes that, "On his eighty-fifth birthday, Emerson remarked, 'I never could give much reality to evil and pain.'" Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 2001 printing, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1953) p. 244.

19. Thoreau and Rousseau, as Melissa Lane observes, did share a kind of Pelagianism. See "Thoreau and Rousseau: Nature as Utopia." Jack Turner, ed., *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

20. See *Journal* on February 10, 1852, quoted earlier in the notes. Also see Richard Bridgman, *Dark Thoreau*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1982).

21. This is perhaps most evident in his essays on John Brown: "A Plea for Captain John Brown" and "The Last Days of John Brown," both written and delivered as lectures in 1860. See Thoreau, *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004).

22. Henry David Thoreau, "T. Pomponius Atticus as an Example," June 30, 1837, in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Edwin Moser, with Alexander C. Kern, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1975) p. 111.

23. Thoreau, "T. Pomponius Atticus as an Example," in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, (1975) p. 111.

24. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 80.

25. Thoreau, "May 26, 1837," in *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 107. It is nevertheless difficult to ascribe to Thoreau an understanding of human nature and morality that parallels Babbitt and Ryn's given his prioritization of moral consistency and purity over moral efficacy. In Babbitt's view the oneness of universality and the changing nature of the particular are synthesized while Thoreau places them permanently at odds with one another.

26. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 80.

27. The extent to which Plato and Aristotle influenced Thoreau is debated. The most comprehensive account of Thoreau's interactions with classical thought is found in Ethel Seybold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1951).

28. Interestingly, many of the ideas Etzler proposes are now realities: including solar power, enormous windmills, earth-movers and other heavy-industrial devices. Thoreau's copy of Etzler's book was an 1842 reprint.

29. Henry David Thoreau, "Paradise (To Be) Regained," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 40.

30. Thoreau, "Paradise (To Be) Regained," (2004) pp. 45–46.

31. Thoreau, "December 20, 1834," *Early Essays*, (1975) pp.5–6.

32. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) p. 40.

33. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. 6, July 7, 1851, p. 291.

34. Though he's more concerned with an understanding of *power* instead of order, we also find Thoreau reflecting on the importance of love in a similar vein in Thoreau, "Paradise (To Be) Regained," in *The Higher Law*, (2004) p. 47.

35. Thoreau, "January 17, 1835," in *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 9.

36. Thoreau, "January 31, 1835," in *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 10.

37. Thoreau, "September 18, 1835," in *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 20.

38. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 51.

39. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, book I, ch. VII, in *The Basic Political Writings*, (1987) p. 150.

40. Thoreau, "October 16, 1835," in *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 24

41. Heinz Eulau, "Wayside Challenger: Some Remarks on the Politics of Henry David Thoreau," in *The Antioch Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, (Winter, 1949) p. 514.

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Chapter Four

Resistance and Right

Thoreau's brief stay in the Concord jail following his failure to pay a poll tax in the 1840s has been the subject of legends, and is often dramatized in the secondary literature or in the 1969 stage play, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*.[1] Thoreau's simple act of civil disobedience—a term he may never have used—has become a critical theme of the American literary imagination. Yet there is something both liberating and unsettling about Thoreau's more explicitly political writings and reflections on these matters. As the great author, Wallace Stegner, once wrote of Thoreau's essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," "[I]t is as explosive as dynamite caps, and should not be left around where children might find it and play with it."[2]

Thoreau lives in a tension between the moral and idyllic imagination with a tendency to favor the idyllic. To better understand the political implications of this tension, the analysis now turns to what Bob Pepperman Taylor refers to as Thoreau's "polemical essays." These pieces are distinguished by their more explicit references to politics. Pepperman Taylor reads these essays as rhetorical reactions to the times and as responses to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), Thoreau's arrest for refusing to pay taxes, and as a reaction to John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry and his subsequent execution. While these historical moments provoke and inform all the essays, referring to them more as distractions and rhetoric, as Pepperman Taylor describes, does not warrant isolating them as inconsistent with the rest of his work.[3] Thoreau admitted deliberately overstating his case in some of these writings, but his imagination remained in the tension between the idyllic and the moral. His hyperbole and "rhetoric" may be indicative of what Thoreau actually believed, and a closer reading reveals that the more reserved Tho-

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reau of *Walden* and *The Maine Woods* is the same passionate polemicist of "Slavery in Massachusetts." His words may have been hyperbole to the reader or listener, but not for Thoreau.

THOREAU, "PHILOSOPHER OF FREEDOM"

Thoreau is perennially recognized as one of America's great voices on the topic of liberty. James Mackaye, for example, called him the "philosopher of freedom."[4] Following Emerson, Thoreau strives for a radical level of moral and intellectual autonomy in which one's will, imagination, and reason are free from "slavish" imitation. Thoreau's intuition of freedom evinces very little of the moral-idyllic tension, however. His capitulation to a nearly unrestrained and idyllic concept of freedom provokes the tension in the imagination throughout his work. This is particularly true when taking a closer look at Thoreau's influential concepts of the "Wild" and "Wildness," as foundational to his notion of freedom. Additionally, as Robert D. Richardson observes, "recognition of the wildness within has for Thoreau . . . the vital, tonic effect of restoring man to emotional and cognitive awareness of his essential innermost self. The rediscovery of the wild is a process the opposite of alienation, restoring contact . . . between man and his best, most vital self."[5]

A preoccupation with alienation from one's "true self" was a ubiquitous theme in nineteenth-century philosophy and political thought. Thoreau is no exception to this trend, but his emphasis on overcoming alienation by elevating the *wild* as a means to autonomy may have been quite novel at the time. Jane Bennett describes this equation of "wild" and "autonomous" in considerable detail, but she recognizes hesitancy in Thoreau. There is a tension between the reality of living within an historical order and taking "wild" as "free" to its logical conclusion. Still, the move toward that more idyllic and radical sense of wildness is central to Thoreau's imagination.[6]

"Wild," conceived as novel, mysterious, and free, is simultaneously the absence of moral order, community, and conformity. While Thoreau recognizes the necessity for some level of order and conformity, it must be minimal. Each individual ought to be as self-determined as possible. This "wildness" had been fundamentally denied to the enslaved blacks of the southern United States, and Thoreau's passionate abhorrence of slavery grew out of his empathy for those deprived of such freedom.

Thoreau's most extensive remarks on slavery are found in his essay, "Slavery in Massachusetts." Delivered as a lecture on July 4, 1854, the piece was, in part, a response to the recent passage of the Fugitive Slave Law and the efforts of Massachusetts to capture and return the runaway slave, Anthony Burns, to the South. The thrust of Thoreau's argument was that the Fugi-

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tive Slave Act, and the Constitution which seemingly supported it, must be disobeyed. Right must be given precedence over Law. The people of Massachusetts, by obeying the law, were demonstrating their own enslavement to injustice.[7] Northerners who celebrated the Battle of Lexington and Concord that began the War for Independence were deeply hypocritical to celebrate a liberty they did not share with blacks. Thoreau made it clear that he would not consent to be governed by any laws or individuals who upheld such injustice. He issued a warning to his fellow citizens who would choose to assert the rule of human law at the expense of Right, or the "Higher Law" as it relates to justice: "I wish my countrymen to consider that whatever the human law may be, neither an individual nor a nation can ever commit the least act of injustice against the obscurest individual without having to pay the penalty for it."[8]

Despite Thoreau's diatribe against Northern hypocrites, he wonders if democracy may be the preferred remedy for this case. The laws and the representatives have no apparent interest in justice, but perhaps the voters will.[9] Thoreau unintentionally follows Rousseau's lead in stating that more direct democracy is preferable to representative democracy as a means to achieve fidelity to the Right. Something critical is lost when democracy is diluted by an "indirect" representative democracy. In "A Plea for Captain John Brown," Thoreau would write similarly: "We talk about a *representative* government; but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of the mind, and the whole heart, are not represented! . . . The only government that I recognize . . . is that power that establishes justice in the land."[10] Thoreau hesitates to prescribe democracy always and entirely. A referendum on slavery would produce "something of some value," but he does not go so far to say that it would solve the problem. There is too much sympathy, as he sees it, for the law and injustice perpetuated by the North's complacency. In contrast to a more idyllic mode, Thoreau exhibits a modest level of realism in this regard by neither dismissing democracy nor absolutizing it, but it is important to note that his realism concerning democracy is not at the expense of a more idyllic concept of freedom. The answer to the problem of democracy is not leadership, positive law, or order. A better democracy must be committed to an abstract Right accessed by conscience.

Thoreau then makes the striking claim that the very rule of law, and the faith Americans place in it, is an obstacle to liberty itself. "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free. They are the lovers of law and order who observe the law when the government breaks it."[11] People make law free by living according to a law and Right they would choose to impose on themselves. In the absence of fidelity to a Higher Law, there is no obligation to embrace man-made laws. Later he reinforces this anti-law sentiment after John Brown's execution, writing, "Look not to

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legislatures and churches for your guidance, nor to any soulless, *incorporated* bodies, but to *inspirited* or inspired ones."[12] The *true* judge and the *true* law stand above those who sit on the Court bench. He who is most attuned to the higher, abstract truth of his own consciousness holds the court to a higher standard.[13]

At first, Thoreau's objection to unjust laws moves in the direction of the individual as being a kind of legislature and judge unto himself. Yet above the individual and the government, Thoreau places this "judge of the judge"—an individual faithfully attuned to Right whose lofty character places him above human law. One is reminded again of Rousseau and his proposal in *On the Social Contract* for a "Great Legislator" to shape the law impartially and in fidelity to Right.[14]

Thoreau, like Rousseau, desires that politics and law favor only Right. Expediency, compromise, and partiality corrupt the law and government. However, a pure and impartial individual is remarkably difficult to come by. It is to Rousseau's credit that he, unlike Thoreau, recognizes that only gods could achieve the ideal of perfect laws and uncorrupt government. If laws cannot offer the reform and freedom that Thoreau prefers, then perhaps democracy could offer "something of some value" as Thoreau himself already mentioned. He has little hope in this regard, however, since the men and women of principle are ultimately outnumbered by those who surrender to expediency and silence in the name of a misplaced patriotism. "I would remind my countrymen," Thoreau warns, "that they are to be men first, and Americans only at a late and convenient hour. No matter how valuable law may be to protect your property, even to keep soul and body together, if it do not keep you and humanity together."[15] What does it profit Americans, Thoreau might ask, to gain the whole world and forfeit their souls?

The fault in Thoreau's imagination of freedom and its relationship to democracy and law is that, in place of just or unjust laws, Thoreau would insert abstractions and sentiments. In place of protecting the Constitution, he would call for judges and lawyers in particular to be "servants of humanity." "The question is," he asks, "not whether you or your grandfather, seventy years ago, did not enter into an agreement to serve the devil . . . but whether you will not now, for once and at last, serve God . . . or that of your ancestor, by obeying that eternal and only just CONSTITUTION, which He, and not any Jefferson or Adams, has written in your being."[16] Thoreau never elucidates what he means by this CONSTITUTION. In keeping with the earlier essay, "On Resistance to Civil Government," it would seem that the Right, the good, true and, beautiful are entirely subjective, abstract, and ahistorical. While recognizing the possibility of universality, Thoreau is unwilling to consider the possibility of the good, true and, beautiful being realized in man-made institutions or society. To achieve a synthesis between the universal and the particular, between the changeless and unchanging, in Thoreau's

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view, is to effectively ignore the former and worship the latter. “There is no such thing as accomplishing a righteous reform by the use of ‘expediency.’” He declares. The “higher law,” for Thoreau, must be elevated above Constitutions, statutes, and policies. Furthermore, “the fate of the country does not depend on how you vote at the polls,” he observes, “it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.”[17]

Though he has suddenly thrown out the democracy he recommended only pages earlier, Thoreau articulates very clearly that there is indeed a connection between the morality and character of the people and the character of its government. Still, his uncompromising idealistic morality cannot survive the historical reality of political life. He would dismiss policy as a moral statement or judgment, but what would he think of the *policy* freeing the slaves several years later? While policy may not, of its own accord, possess moral authority, it would seem that Thoreau would go so far as to evacuate it of any moral content whatsoever. Expediency, efficacy, plurality, necessity: these are the enemies of Thoreau’s concept of freedom. That is, Thoreau’s concept of freedom is an individual of conscience autonomously attuning him or herself to a universal, objective Right or principle, and eschewing recognition of, or allegiance to, any contingency or institution at odds with Right. Freedom is the will to the Right lived in resistance to a reality that would demand compromise.

Thoreau’s politics of withdrawal and despair are unsurprising in light of such elevated and idyllic expectations, and anarchy may even be preferable. “Let each inhabitant of the State,” he writes, “dissolve his union with her, as long as she delays to do her duty.”[18] Were he to find a State committed to “duty” and “Right,” he would fight for it. After all, “The effect of a good government is to make life more valuable; of a bad one, to make it less valuable.”[19] But the America he finds himself in has demonstrably rejected such value by continuing to surrender to expediency and compromise, and by neglecting to remedy the injustice of slavery. Perhaps, he suggests, withdrawing from the country and politics is not necessary. The nation has already abandoned him: “I have lived for the last month—and I think that every man in Massachusetts capable of the sentiment of patriotism must have had a similar experience—with the sense of having suffered a vast and indefinite loss. I did not know at first what ailed me. At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country.”[20] The United States is no longer, “Thoreau writ large,” if it ever was.

The combination of despair and withdrawal, however, is only one potential consequence faced by the individual who is committed to an idyllic political morality. Despair and violence may also emerge. “My thoughts are murder to State,” he writes ominously, “and involuntarily I go plotting against her.”[21] It is little wonder that Thoreau would become one of the most

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vocal and passionate defenders of John Brown. In “A Plea for Captain John Brown,” he allows for a surprising flexibility regarding the use of violence in the defense of Right:

> It was [John Brown’s] peculiar doctrine that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave. *I agree with him*. They who are continually shocked by slavery have some right to be shocked by the violent death of the slaveholder, but no others. Such will be more shocked by his life than by his death. . . . I speak for the slave when I say that I prefer the philanthropy of Captain Brown to that philanthropy which neither shoots me nor liberates me. . . . I do not wish to kill nor to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable. We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day.[22]

In 1859, Brown was planning his attack on Harpers Ferry, which would take place in October. Thoreau and others had met him a year earlier when he visited the Greater Boston area campaigning secretly for arms, finances, and fighters to launch a guerilla-style attack on the slave states. There is no evidence that Thoreau knew of John Brown’s violent intentions, but when Brown made his move on a military arsenal in October 1859, Thoreau was clearly impressed. Brown had hoped to incite an insurrection of slaves, but was defeated by Robert E. Lee. Most of Brown’s companions were killed, and Brown himself was executed for treason in December. Thoreau initially believed that Brown had died in the raid and he wanted to publicly defend his cause. He called for a lecture on October 30, when popular opinion in the North had begun to turn strongly against Brown. For Thoreau, Brown embodied a “life with principle” and faithfulness to Right. Violence was not always, in itself, desirable for Thoreau, but it was preferable to slavery and often necessary once the government sides with injustice.[23]

For all Thoreau’s talk about elevating principle above expediency, his hagiography of John Brown is striking. While commentators, such as Robert D. Richardson couch Thoreau’s advocacy of Brown as a nod to political necessity and expediency, Thoreau seems to have little interest in such a narrative. Brown’s actions were honorable precisely because they were unrestrained by convention, opinion, and expediency. They were, in Thoreau’s interpretation, entirely free, justified, and principled. Expediency was never a part of Brown’s concerns, according to Thoreau. Instead, those who vilify and condemn Brown betray an unwillingness to see the possibility of true heroism in Thoreau’s day.

> [John Brown] was a superior man. He did not value his bodily life in comparison with ideal things. He did not recognize unjust human laws, but resisted them as he was bid. . . . No man in America has ever stood up so persistently

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> and effectively for the *dignity of human nature*, knowing himself for a man, and the equal of any and all governments. . . . He could not have been tried by a jury of his peers, because his peers did not exist.[24]

Here may be the only place where Thoreau explicitly grounds his opposition to slavery in the priority of human dignity. Thoreau's opposition to slavery is, remarkably, almost never explicitly rooted in the dignity or rights of the slaves themselves. He never asks if southern soldiers, citizens, and slaveholders are also due the same human dignity, or if their participation in slavery is itself a forfeiture of that dignity. There is a profound tension between Thoreau's work and much of his actual life in this regard. In his writing, the slaves themselves seem almost incidental to his arguments against unjust laws and governance. In his life, however, he was well known for his compassion toward slaves, Irish immigrants, the disabled, and to children. His love for his family was unwavering and reflected much more than mere sentiment. There is a tension between an abstract morality and an obsession with autonomy on the one hand, and with Thoreau's ability to demonstrate exemplary selflessness on the other. Though fiercely independent, this tension, thanks to the moral imagination, did little to dissuade him from living, and not merely feeling, his humanitarianism.[25]

Beneath the idyllic-moral tension in Thoreau's imagination of slavery and the limits of law and politics lies another aspect of freedom, which is described toward the end of "Slavery in Massachusetts." If laws and politics will not afford Thoreau the opportunity to realize his commitment to Right, and if violence or democracy cannot bring about the justice he longs for, then perhaps Nature would provide a better foundation and companion. He cannot despair entirely because Nature and nature's laws still speak to a hope in finding the purity and order that man longs for.[26] Thoreau desires to be as autonomous as possible, but the needs and enslavement of others impedes on his own freedom. Nature alone seems to offer solace in such desperate circumstances.

Thoreau actively opposes slavery, but he has seemingly written off politics and representative government as incapable of fidelity to the Right over the "expedient." He cannot conceive of a world in which a universal autonomy and Right could be realized in the particulars of politics and policy. One might find such character in the man of conscience and principle, but these individuals are rare. Yet this is the same Thoreau who gives public lectures, publishes his calls for self-reform in national periodicals, and participates in the Underground Railroad. He is profoundly political and involved in the greatest and most divisive issues of his day.

The moral imagination is not completely absent from Thoreau, but the idyllic imagination regularly wins out in his discussion of law, government, and freedom. He simply, and quite consistently, refuses to concede ground to

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concrete reality in the articulation of his moral and ethical philosophy. The claims of necessity and expediency, compromise, and plurality are inimical to his understanding of freedom and the moral life. Proportion and prudence, to Thoreau, would likely seem more like excuses and obstacles than as elements of moral reality. Indeed, Thoreau moves dangerously in the direction of actually abandoning concrete morality altogether. In an attempt to articulate a radical concept of freedom and moral purity, he undercuts the grounds on which that morality might come to fruition in action. Still, his most famous political essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," recommends a kind of *inaction* that, by design, provokes others to act politically.

THOREAU'S RESISTANCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT REVISITED

For all the significance that Thoreau's ideas have had for American politics he was, himself, vehemently opposed to interaction with, even to the existence of politics. Human law and democracy ultimately disappointed him. He would likely have taken the title of "political thinker" as an insult. He writes in "A Natural History of Massachusetts," that "[t]he merely political aspect of the land is never very cheering; men are degraded when considered as the members of a political organization."[27] Given his disposition, what might be made of his most famous (or infamous) political essay, "Resistance to Civil Government"? Given his imagination of political morality, freedom, and law, it is no surprise when he begins the essay by stating:

> I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe—"That government is best which governs not at all;" and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.[28]

Despite this frequently recited passage, Thoreau's work ought not to be conceived as *a*political. While he was no fan of the government, the essay itself was born in a rather conspicuous political act. In July of 1846, while living at Walden Pond, Thoreau was arrested for his refusal to pay the poll tax. He was detained in Concord jail for a single evening until someone (possibly Emerson or one of Thoreau's Aunts, though precisely who is unknown) paid on his behalf and he was released. In response, Thoreau composed his "most often read—and taught—essay and one of the great Western statements on the importance of conscience."[29] Rooting his argument in personal experience, Thoreau demonstrated and justified the principle (not original to him) of resisting force without the use of force. His position was

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timely and contradicts popular perceptions of Thoreau as indifferent to the issues and influences of his day. The abolitionists of his day were split on the use of force for ending slavery, and at the time of this writing Thoreau rejected violence as a means for emancipation.[30] The same position would later be championed by Mahatma Gandhi who, inspired by Thoreau, would significantly impact Martin Luther King, Jr's similar acts of nonviolent protest and disobedience.

Published in Elizabeth Peabody's *Aesthetic Papers*, "Resistance to Civil Government" eschewed cooperation, compliance, and obedience to the American government on the grounds that it no longer represented the people, protected slavery, funded an unjust war with Mexico, and ultimately abandoned the rule of conscience. Bob Pepperman Taylor observes that it would be inaccurate to say that Thoreau opposes all government or the U.S. Constitution. Thoreau objects only to an *unjust* government and *unjust* laws, and would gladly subject himself to a more principled regime.[31] The problem is that, given Thoreau's intuition of an ideal political morality and freedom, the realization of a sufficiently just government is very unlikely. Thoreau did not appeal to religion, law, constitutions, or even history to make his case for the supremacy of the "Higher Law." Indeed, such institutions might ultimately be obstacles to the triumph of an abstract Right. The government had forfeited, in the name of expediency, the collective will to that of one or a few privileged individuals. In the process, political leadership and administration exposed itself more as a useless obstacle to individual freedom than as a source of order, deliberation, and protection.[32]

Pepperman Taylor writes, "[t]here is a tension in [Thoreau's polemical essays] between the duties of citizenship and the liberty of the individual."[33] The government has become an obstacle to the liberty of the people and must therefore be limited, if not eliminated. Thoreau is making, however, a decidedly Rousseauistic turn. His concept of government and democracy begins to sound very similar to the "General Will." "The government itself," he writes, "is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will."[34] The tension between duties and liberty is reduced when those duties originate in individual liberty. A few paragraphs later, he unpacks the meaning of this concept whereby the will of the people is the expression of their individual consciences, which cannot be represented. If the government were more true to the Right and to individual conscience it would be the best government; that is, one in which morally free men are ruled only by those laws which they would have imposed on themselves. Thoreau claims that this need not result in anarchism, writing "But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it."[35] The rule of conscience or the rule of Right is

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achieved by expressing the law or order that one is willing to respect and obey. The precise means needed to express this consent or to resolve conflicts between competing consciences is not mentioned. Thoreau seems to assume, like Rousseau, that if man is genuinely attuned to the Right by means of conscience, this Right will reveal itself uniformly among others of the same conscience and character.

Thoreau's idealistic expectations and disdain for government exemplifies the perennial call for the elimination of politics altogether. Benedetto Croce was well aware, and rightly critical, of the disposition. He writes:

> Politics and filth are so frequently identified in the ordinary conversation of people that the thoughtful person is rather puzzled by the situation. Why should politics, one of the fundamental activities of man, one of the perpetual forms of the human spirit, alone enjoy homage of such contemptuous language? We never describe other forms of activity as essentially filth. We do not habitually think of scientific, or artistic, or social or moral activity, in any such terms of repugnance.[36]

Croce's comments could easily apply to Thoreau, who holds politics to an ahistorical and idealistic standard it cannot meet. While one justifiably agrees with Thoreau that slavery is evil, that the Fugitive Slave Act was unjust and the Mexican-American War was highly objectionable and imperialistic, these failures do not render politics void of morality. Thoreau's very actions demonstrate well that political activity can be morally motivated and that politics ought not to be abandoned. The very act of "civil disobedience" is quite meaningless without politics and without one to disobey. Yet with Thoreau it becomes clear that the issue is less the messiness of politics and more the threat which the rule of law poses to moral autonomy. Not only is law deficient in making men free, it even fails to make men just, undermining their will to act in accordance with "common sense and conscience."[37]

Despite moments in earlier works and his *Journal* which hinted at the culpability of the individual for his or her actions and the emphasis on one's freedom, Thoreau seems to believe that a government or law can override or overcome one's fidelity to Right. How is it that law cannot make man just, but it *can* make them unjust? The soldiers leaving for the Mexican-American War march "against their wills" as though their conscience and common sense was somehow detached from their practical action by law itself. Submission to the state and its laws is, for Thoreau, a virtual abandonment of one's very humanity: "The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies."[38]

Yet later he asks, after describing his night in the Concord jail, "What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of *men* being forced to live this way or that by masses of men."[39] By emphasizing *men* he is

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distinguishing those who are seemingly more autonomous. Humans are, in a sense, though, always free. But that freedom is forfeit when they submit or order their will to something other than a conscience attuned to Right. Thoreau asserts that only those of heroic stature could achieve such a distinction: "A very few—as Heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."[40] The hero or the patriot would seemingly be willing to serve the state if the latter would align itself with the same Right as that of the hero's conscience. Until the state submits to this objective "conscience"—presumably by abandoning slavery and the Mexican-American War—such cooperation on behalf of the hero is unacceptable. One's very association with the American government is reprehensible, and so much evil pervades its action and inaction that revolution may be in order.[41]

While his later essays on John Brown may prove otherwise, Thoreau's evocation of revolution is not a call for violence but for an immediate, unqualified cessation of slavery and an end to the war with Mexico. He, like Emerson and the influential transcendentalist, Theodore Parker, was adamant about accusing the Northern States' complicity in the endurance of slavery by their commercial activities, cooperation with the Fugitive Slave Act and overall inaction on the matter.[42] This latter observation demonstrates a moment of moral imagination for Thoreau. Acknowledging the very real interconnectedness of the North's inaction and commercial activity with the injustice of slavery may serve his more abstract ends, but it also demonstrates Thoreau's sense of the concrete, historical nature of the problem of slavery.

Thoreau also criticizes those who would rely only on elections to remedy the situation—those who demonstrate their tacit consent to slavery and the Mexican-American War through inaction. "Cast your whole vote," he writes, "not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight."[43] Despite these calls for citizens to become people of conscience, Thoreau explains that "It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous, wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support."[44]

How does this disposition resist the North's seeming indifference to slaves? Even if the North, by ignoring the Fugitive Slave Act and ending its commercial collusion in products of slave labor, helps advance abolition, why not actively advocate for changes in policy and elect more sympathetic leaders? While the essay is not a comprehensive call to inaction, Thoreau leaves open the possibility of withdrawing from the problem altogether. This is especially true in his growing call for what amounts to little more than a

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revolution of abstractions. The moral imagination moves him to action, and the idyllic imagination reduces those efforts to sentimental humanitarianism. Nevertheless, he claims that, "Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides States and churches . . . it divides the *individual*, separating the diabolical in him from the divine."[45]

While Thoreau rightly identifies in human persons a division between higher and lower potentialities, his understanding of "higher" is the life of action which takes little-to-no account of historical circumstances or moral efficacy. Principle and fidelity to Right trump concrete, historicized morality. Since the existence of circumstances in which action from pure principle could succeed is unlikely, his call inevitably leads to inaction or at least disobedience. "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly," he writes, "the true place for a just man is also a prison."[46] But an escapist and primarily sentimental morality is unlikely to make a difference, and may not warrant the attention of the authorities at all. How could such a person actually pose a threat, except to his or her own cause?

Ultimately, Thoreau demonstrates a disturbing and self-righteous arrogance, as well as a resistance to treating other persons as they are, opting instead for treating others as he wishes them to be. In keeping with his account of friendship, he would rather acquaint himself with the *idea* of a person than the actual person.[47]

According to Thoreau, statesmen and legislators "are wont to forget that the world is not governed by policy and expediency. . . . The lawyer's truth is not Truth, but consistency, or a consistent expediency. Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not concerned chiefly to reveal the justice that may consist with wrong-doing."[48] In other words, and in keeping with a major theme of Thoreau's entire argument, truth is ahistorical. Necessity and circumstances, what he calls "expediency," cannot be accounted for in considerations of justice and right.

He finishes the essay by writing, "There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly."[49] Thoreau's "truly free and enlightened state" is a city in speech and imagination only. The injustices of slavery and the Mexican-American War were rooted deeply in the indifference of the North and the government's enslavement to expedience. The evil was rooted in an abandonment of "conscience" and infidelity to Right. Yet, by the end of the essay, it would seem the only answer is not—as Thoreau wrote earlier—a "better government," but rather its absence.

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Thoreau failed to see the possibility of political solutions to the problems of slavery and the Mexican-American War. Instead of blaming expediency or necessity for injustice, why not consider their efficacy and the way in which they may be of considerable help? Why not pursue a compromise or policy that undermines slavery, following the example of William Wilberforce and the British? Thoreau's idyllic imagination of political morality, human nature, and government served as a roadblock to a more creative moral imagination which may have offered more efficacious means to abolition.

Hannah Arendt, commenting on "Resistance to Civil Government," also recognized that the legacy of Thoreau's civil disobedience renders the idea unpolitical and "fatally subjective." The "political" simply disappears. For Thoreau, "conscience is unpolitical. It is not primarily interested in the world where the wrong is committed or in the consequences that the wrong will have for the future course of the world."[50] The sincerity of Thoreau's objections to slavery and the war with Mexico is evident, but his idyllic imagination could not conceive of a political solution to a problem that was also a product of politics. Heinz Eulau observed:

> It appears that Thoreau could not fully discern that his metaphysical assumptions had to lead, almost necessarily, to ambiguous consequences when subjected to the test of practical politics. The essential weakness of the metaphysical premise is that it is absolutist as long as it deals with abstractions, just as it is relativistic when applied to unique and observable situations. Like his fellow idealists, Thoreau was incapable of recognizing those distinctions of degree which are politically decisive. He could not recognize them because he fell back, again and again, on the principle of individual conscience as the sole valid guide in political action.[51]

Still, as Eulau recognized, it would be unfair to say that Thoreau did not realize the inevitable failure of his own political prescriptions. After all, the author of "Resistance to Civil Government" is the same Thoreau who passionately defended John Brown's violent protest of slavery at Harper's Ferry. His idyllic imagination led him to disparage politics and provoked a considerable disdain for law and democracy. Yet by essentially abandoning "civil disobedience" for John Brown's violence, he has not recovered the moral imagination. Brown's actions and Thoreau's defense still demonstrate a disdain for politics, law, and democracy. Proportion and prudence, or the consideration of concrete, historical reality, is nowhere to be found in Thoreau's prescription. The moral imagination may have alerted him to the evils of slavery and imperialism, but the idyllic imagination directed his response.

Reading "Resistance to Civil Government" through the framework of imagination, then, complicates the work of Len Gougeon, Walter Harding, and Michael Meyer, who see in Thoreau's "reform papers" "a movement from a passive to an active stance."[52] While this reading rings partially true,

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both the passive and active stance were motivated by the same idyllic imagination. Neither the complacency of the North nor the violence of John Brown put an end to slavery. The Union's victory in the Civil War, though critical to the success of abolition, would eventually have to give way to the politics, laws, and amendments necessary to free the slaves. Violence and civil disobedience are by no means inconsequential, and may indeed be necessary in the face of unjust laws. But Thoreau is unwilling to admit that, given the inevitable imperfection of human governance, politics, and laws themselves may be preferable to civil disobedience.

Thoreau's political morality acknowledges the individual's struggle between the higher and lower will, and the grounds for holding one accountable remain intact most of the time. Unlike more extreme forms of the idyllic imagination, Thoreau is not abolishing morality in general, but he does essentially abolish *political* morality. "What is called politics," he writes in "Life Without Principle," "is comparatively something so superficial and inhuman, that, practically, I have never fairly recognized that it concerns me at all."[53] Fidelity to abstract principles and Right render even his most practical and influential idea of civil disobedience very limited. His notion of freedom as a radically absolute autonomy undercuts the very premises of participating in political community and his idealistic notions of friendship and society discourages even the most basic civic relationships. Despite his refusal to pay taxes in support of an unjust cause, his lectures and his participation in the Underground Railroad, the political morality he articulates does not correspond to his otherwise admirable actions.

In many ways, the moral imagination is not necessarily opposed to the means of civil disobedience or violence. The moral imagination resists such generalizations and, instead, wills/desires to respond to the given historical circumstances as they are in the most efficacious way possible. At times, the circumstances may require violence and at other times, nonviolence. Reform may best be achieved through politics, law, democracy, or something entirely different. Thoreau is unwilling to allow for this more historically minded political morality. The end cannot justify the means. For Thoreau, a life in which morality responds primarily to circumstances is a life without principle.

NOTES

1. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).
2. Wallace Stegner, "Qualified Homage to Thoreau," in *Heaven Is Under Our Feet*, ed. by Don Henley and Dave Marsh, (New York: Berkley Books, 1991).
3. Pepperman Taylor, (1996) p. 101. To be sure. Pepperman Taylor does not isolate them either.

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4. James Mackaye, "Introduction," to *Thoreau: Philosopher of Freedom, Writings on Liberty by Henry David Thoreau*, selected with an introduction by James Mackaye, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1930).

5. Richardson, (1986) p. 226.

6. Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994) pp. 18–19.

7. Anthony Burns, the captured runaway slave subject to the Fugitive Slave Law in Massachusetts, was the last runaway slave to be returned to the South by Thoreau's state.

8. Henry David Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 96.

9. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 97.

10. Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 129.

11. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 98.

12. Henry David Thoreau, "The Last Days of John Brown," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 150.

13. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 98.

14. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, book II, ch. VII, in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. by Peter Gay, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) pp. 162–163.

15. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 102.

16. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 103. Emphasis in original.

17. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 104.

18. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 104.

19. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 106.

20. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 106.

21. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) p. 108.

22. Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," (2004) pp. 132–33. Emphasis added.

23. Richardson, (1986) p. 371.

24. Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," (2004) p. 125. Emphasis added.

25. Perhaps the absence of a more sophisticated attention to persons as inviolable is part of the reason that he would go so far as to defend John Brown and his violence. Thoreau would even warn the South at the end of "A Plea" that "revenge" was coming, hinting at the Civil War to begin in a little over a year. To be fair, though, one also recognizes today that there is something self-evidently wrong about slavery. Does Thoreau have an obligation to explain his objection systematically? Our very humanity finds it repulsive. Plus, there is something about the task of successfully understanding and writing about persons that necessarily alludes us. Had Thoreau rooted his objection to slavery in a more comprehensive account of blacks as persons, he would have fallen short precisely *because* blacks are persons. Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 174.

26. Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," (2004) pp. 108–9.

27. Henry David Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," in *Excursions* from *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) p. 4.

28. Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," in *The Higher Law: Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and Reform*, ed. by Wendell Glick, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) p. 63.

29. Richardson, (1986) p. 175.

30. Thoreau was directly responding, agreeing, and distinguishing himself from other writers at the time: "Raymond Adams has pointed out how Thoreau's basic championing of the individual over the state is similar to the position Emerson had just put forward in his essay on 'Politics,' how Thoreau's essay is cast as a reply to chapter three of book six of [William]

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Paley's *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* . . . and to a reform movement called Non-Resistance, associated with abolition, with William Lloyd Garrison, and with Adin Ballou." Richardson, (1986) p. 176.

31. Pepperman Taylor, (1996) pp. 113–14.
32. Thoreau. "Resistance to Civil Government." (2004) p. 64
33. Pepperman Taylor, (1996) p. 114.
34. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 63.
35. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 64.
36. Benedetto Croce, "Disgust for Politics," in *The Conduct of Life*, trans. by Arthur Livingston, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924) p. 255.
37. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 65.
38. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 66.
39. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 81.
40. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 66.
41. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 67.
42. "There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them. . . . There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man. But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it." Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 69.
43. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 76.
44. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 71. Also see p. 74.
45. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 72.
46. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 76.
47. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 85.
48. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) p. 87.
49. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," (2004) pp. 89–90.
50. Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," in *Crises of the Republic*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969–1972) p. 61.
51. Heinz Eulau, "Wayside Challenger: Some Remarks on the Politics of Henry David Thoreau," *The Antioch Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, (Winter, 1949) p. 514.
52. Lou Gougeon, "Thoreau and Reform," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Joel Myerson, (New York: Cambridge University, 1995) p. 196.
53. Thoreau, "Life without Principle," (2004) p. 177.

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Chapter Five

Life with People: Thoreau on Friendship and Community

Thoreau understands human nature as ordered by what man loves, desires, and imagines. Political morality is evaluated on its adherence to abstract "Right," and he elevates an uninhibited individual freedom as the foundation of a fully realized life. Understanding Thoreau's politics, however, calls for a consideration of not simply his understanding of himself and human nature, but of his relationship to the society and community where politics can take place.

Analyzing Thoreau's view of community and society presents several difficulties. His work reveals a temptation to misanthropy, a love of autonomy that may militate against substantive social interaction, and a preoccupation with an abstract Right threatened by historical circumstances. Thoreau's concepts of human nature and moral excellence complicate his position in a community where politics take place, and a tension endures between what seems to be an apolitical Thoreau and his political legacy. By diving deeper into his understanding of friendship specifically, one begins to see how the tension between the moral and idyllic imagination manifests itself in Thoreau's politics and in his view of society and nature.

Why concentrate on friendship? Most Thoreau scholars focus on his understanding of the person as an individual. Thoreau tended to focus on the self, possessing little explicit regard for his associations and context in his writing. Yet if Thoreau's reflections are to be politically meaningful he must, at some point, consider human nature in the context of other humans. Following Aristotle's example, a political thinker considers the implications of friendship and its consequences for order, freedom, and human nature. Emerson's essay on "Friendship" is an important example contemporary with

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Thoreau and likely shaped the latter's own disposition. There is significant continuity on this topic, with both Emerson and Thoreau favoring the idyllic imagination in their view of friendship.

Emerson on Friendship

The most striking element of Thoreau and Emerson's accounts of friendship is their tendency to value the *ideal* of friendship, or the friend in the abstract, much more than a friend in the concrete. Friendship is a sentiment, a dream, and an inspiration. With Emerson it is remarkable how much more he values friendship with a complete stranger than with a more familiar face. He describes, for example, the excitement of welcoming a stranger to a home and how the anticipation of the other's presence seems to inspire great desire and reflection.[1] But as soon as he begins to listen to, and focus on, the other, breaking down the strangeness and cultivating familiarity, the sentiment of friendship is no more. Emerson suggests that the importance of this unfamiliarity and sentiment is so important for friendship that it may be more appropriate for the "friends" to be separated.[2] The thought or idea of the friend is preferable to the presence of the friend and the inevitable impositions which such presence may require. Emerson admits his preference for the friend-as-abstraction over the friend-as-concrete-person, observing that "Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed."[3] He claims that "Friends such as we desire are dreams and fables."[4] Later, in a brief example of a letter he might write to a friend he observes that "[a]lmost all people descend to meet. All association must be a compromise. . . . What a perpetual disappointment is actual society, even of the virtuous and gifted!"[5]

Given this view of friendship, how might Emerson define love? It would seem that, for him, as the moral and physical effort of friendship increases, the amount of love in the relationship decreases. Early in the "Friendship" essay he writes, "Love, which is the essence of God, is not for levity, but for the total worth of man. Let us not have this childish luxury in our regards, but the austerest worth; let us approach our friend with an audacious trust in the truth of his heart, in the breadth, impossible to be overturned, of his foundations."[6] For Emerson, there is a tension between loving the truth of the heart of a particular man or woman and loving mankind in general. The moral imagination seems unlikely to emerge victorious out of this tension. He writes later that "[i]n the last analysis, love is only the reflection of a man's own worthiness from other men. Men have sometimes exchanged names with their friends, as if they would signify that in their friend each loved his own soul."[7] The Christian teaching of "Love your neighbor as yourself" has become "Love yourself by loving your neighbor." This is also why Emerson describes the composition of friendship as an equal combination of truth and tenderness. By "truth" he means that friendship allows for each individual to

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be as sincere as possible, but this is realized only in the *ideal* of friendship. As Emerson says, "Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins."[8] It is no wonder then, when Emerson writes, "I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would haw them where I can find them, but I seldom use them. We must have society on our own terms, and admit or exclude it on the slightest cause. I cannot afford to speak much with my friend. If he is great he makes me so great that I cannot descend to converse."[9] Friendship, when lived rightly, undermines itself. Its fulfillment results in its abandonment.

Emerson's account of friendship is in sharp contrast to the classical tradition of Aristotle, for whom true friendship based on mutual love was rare but neither impossible nor abstract. Though lesser friendships might be motivated by utility or pleasure, true friendship was motivated by a desire for the other's well-being. Friendship was love for the other simply for his or her sake, and formed the basis of a well-ordered political community. There was no distinction, for Aristotle, between a "friend" in the abstract and the actual friend that one encountered in everyday life. Conversation did not require condescension among friends and could even take place between a master and a slave. Aristotle was not as concerned with how friendship hindered or helped individual liberty and autonomy. Instead, the quality of a friendship was a product of mutual, selfless love for the cultivation of virtue and order. Thoreau would do little to remedy the idyllic slant of Emerson's idea of friendship, but he seems to have, at times, considered a more classical understanding. Nowhere is Thoreau's intuition of friendship so extensively developed as in his first published book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).

Thoreau on Friendship

In 1839 Thoreau and his brother, John, enjoyed a canoe trip on the Concord and Merrimack rivers. Ten years later Thoreau would publish his account and reflections on the journey in *A Week*. Written in a manner reminiscent of Göethe's *Italian Journeys*, *A Week* is not simple travel literature.[10] It is a fascinating reflection on topics as diverse as ancient European and modern New England history, poetry, friendship, philosophy, education, Eastern religion, literature, Christianity, community, language, and much more. Though the book was a commercial flop and incurred a significant debt upon Thoreau, it ought not to live in the shadow of *Walden*. Indeed, the first drafts of both works were completed while he lived at Walden Pond. It is also colored deeply by John's untimely death in January 1842.

Given Thoreau's close relationship to John, it is little wonder that the longest digression, and perhaps the most dominant topic of *A Week*, is the subject of friendship. Toward the middle of the "Wednesday" chapter, Tho-

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reau observes that "No word is oftener on the lips of men than Friendship, and indeed no thought is more familiar to their aspirations. All men are dreaming of it, and its drama, which is always a tragedy, is enacted daily. It is the secret of the universe."[11] Friendship, or at least what Thoreau understands to be *true* friendship, is mysterious and has, in his estimation, seldom been written about despite its ubiquitous presence. Like Emerson, though, Thoreau seems much more concerned with the *idea* of friendship than with friends themselves: "We are dreaming that our Friends are our *Friends*, and that we are our Friends' *Friends*. Our actual Friends are but distant relations of those to whom we are pledged."[12] The "tragedy" in the "drama of friendship," then, is that the ideal or dream of true friendship is seldom realized.[13]

The genuine "friendliness" of Thoreau's reflection is questionable. A tension remains between the desire and importance of friendship in the abstract and the tragic inability for it to be found in everyday life. Thoreau consistently prefers the ideal friend, who is the one of his memory and idyllic imagination.[14] What is this ideal of friendship? Friendship for Thoreau would be a kind of mutual elevation of two persons in which the relationship and "purity" of true human intercourse would leave neither person unchanged, and would never be at the expense of freedom and sincerity.[15]

Friendship, if it is not to impose on human freedom, is not the product of social and moral effort but a sentiment inspiring others by not making demands on them. Man both loves universal mankind and is a part of the universal mankind that is loved. It is a friendship of affinity and sentiment which theoretically does not undermine autonomy because it focuses on one's relationship to humans in general rather than to specific humans. For a writer famous for his so-called championing of individualism, the disappearance of individuals in Thoreau's concept of friendship is striking.

Another strange and often overlooked aspect of Thoreau's concept of friendship is that it is "unwilled." He writes in *A Week* that "The books for young people say a great deal about the *selection* of Friends; it is because they really have nothing to say about *Friends*. They mean associates and confidants merely."[16] If the youth and their books really understood friendship, it would be conceived more as something that simply *happens* to an individual with no consent required. "I never asked thy leave to let me love thee,—I have a right. I love thee not as something private and personal, which is your own, but as something universal and worthy of love, which I have found."[17] This is how friendship "happens" to people. Consenting to association with another would be less free and too personal. The universal would be corrupted by the particular. Individuals only consent to be themselves and to love whomever they wish, and when they love, they love what is universal *in* the particular person. The person is, at best, incidental to love.

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Still, could Thoreau be read in a more Aristotelian fashion, in that, the removal of consent from the formation of friendship is Thoreau's call to love others as they are and not as he wants them to be? Is this not loving the other for his or her own sake?[18] The problem is that the very friend to whom Thoreau pays homage cannot exist. The friend is a dream, void of any reality and subject to intimacy only in sentiment. David Robinson offers an alternative reading of this same passage, explaining that:

> To love one another as "something universal" is to love some power in which we too can participate and derive new identity. While Thoreau's language seems at first to idealize the loved one as theoretical or unreal . . . his deeper purpose is to suggest that the love of another brings us a greater sense of our own unrealized capabilities for goodness, which we see exemplified in the one we love.[19]

Yet there is no evidence in the text to suggest that such a "larger" perception was ever intended for realization in concrete, moral effort. Thoreau's imagination of rightly ordered friendship is a self-centered emotionalism in which love for the other is ultimately love for no one except the self. Robinson himself admits this, writing, "The obvious danger of friendship conceived as the unwilled love of 'something' universal' in another is that it threatens to transform the most intensely personal of inner drives into something coldly impersonal."[20]

Another fundamental aspect of Thoreau's imagination on friendship and human relationships is his understanding of love. While he has important remarks to make on love in *A Week*, his most explicit treatment of the topic comes in his letters to Harrison Blake. After Blake married one of his students in 1852, he wrote to both Thoreau and Bronson Alcott asking "how they thought a man and a woman could 'help each other to be more truly solitary in the good [and] beautiful sense, to be more truly free, to be nearer the common Friend that we could be, apart?"[21] Thoreau's response was to illuminate a mysterious quality in love, its perfection in the abstract, the manner in which it is known more in its absence and in its participation in eternity. Love is primarily feminine and often at odds with wisdom and "good sense."[22] At the same time, "Love must be as much a light as a flame,"[23] bringing discernment and sight to an otherwise blind heart. Love is also a "severe critic," in that it requires much effort on the part of lovers, including an almost divine and comprehensive knowledge of the person which one loves. At the center of Thoreau's essay to Blake, he offers one of his most explicit acknowledgements of imagination:

> In love and friendship the imagination is as much exercised as the heart; and if either is outraged the other will be estranged. It is commonly the imagination which is wounded first, rather than the heart—it is so much the more sensitive.

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> *Comparatively*, we can excuse any offence against the heart, but not against the imagination. The imagination knows—nothing escapes its glance from out its eyry—and it controls the breast. . . . The imagination never forgets, it is a re-membering. It is not foundationless, but most reasonable, and it alone uses all the knowledge of the intellect.[24]

Thoreau has learned to appreciate the imagination's centrality and its role in love and will. Who or what one loves shapes the imagination, and the imagination shapes what one loves or does.

Returning to *A Week*, love and friendship must also exhibit a commitment to *truth*. Thoreau writes that "sometimes we are said to love another, that is, to stand in a true relation to him, so that we give the best to, and receive the best from, him. Between whom there is hearty truth, there is love; and in proportion to our truthfulness and confidence in one another, our lives are divine and miraculous, and answer to our ideal."[25] By *best* he means "most true" or sincere. Accommodating a friend or "being someone else" is a violation of true friendship.

Furthermore, true friendship will cultivate great virtues and reform among society.[26] How does such cultivation take place? Thoreau's friendship is an unwilled affinity for an abstraction, so cultivating or educating the will makes little sense. Just, magnanimous and sincere are qualities of character demonstrated by willing and practical action ignored by Thoreau's concept of friendship. "Friendship exists only as an ideal," Jane Bennett observes of Thoreau, "its home is the imagination."[27] As part of this ideal, friends must also be "perfectly," equal, and friendship "cannot well spare any outward sign of equal obligation and advantage. . . . The one's love is exactly balanced and represented by the other's."[28]

Because love of the abstract other is unwilled, there seems to be a kind of power or capacity for friendship that exists independently of the persons themselves. Humans draw on this same source regardless of how *much* we say we love or *who* we are. The obligations and expectations remain the same. Thoreau's concept of true friendship does not entertain obligations and expectations since the capacity for friendship is equal irrespective of duty or the claims of others. In the same spirit, Thoreau writes, "[i]t takes two to speak the truth—one to speak, and another to hear."[29] One may be the speaker or the hearer, and the latter is likely only when the equality he just mentioned is violated. Quoting Confucius, Thoreau writes, "'never contract Friendship with a man who is not better than thyself.' It is the merit and preservation of Friendship, that it takes place on a level higher than the actual characters of the parties would seem to warrant."[30]

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The sincerity of Thoreau's remarks on equality is questionable, because the equality he describes is entirely a product of Thoreau's imagination. The idealized friend—the only friend he willingly tolerates—is "better than thyself" merely because of the friend's association with Thoreau's own "choicest thoughts."

Friendship is also a moment of vulnerability in which one's freedom and self-understanding risk being undermined by the very existence of someone else. One may even be challenged by the other's difference. It is no wonder then that Thoreau makes the deeply problematic comment that, "Even the utmost goodwill and harmony and practical kindness are not sufficient for Friendship, for Friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody."[31] Friendship brings order and truth to society because it is the only context in which truth can be spoken. But the equality he speaks of is less an equality of position, value or as under law, and is more a kind of *sameness*: a unison evoked by the word "melody." Friends in harmony could work together in the same song and toward the same end despite not being in unison. Friends in melody discourage diversity as an obstacle to the ideal. The problem is that Thoreau's lofty expectations and ideals of friendship ultimately leave him lonely and isolated from the very people with whom he might speak truth. He laments this in his *Journal*, saying, "Here I am thirty-four years old, and yet my life is almost wholly unexpanded. . . . There is such an interval between my ideal and the actual in many instances that I may say I am unborn. There is the instinct for society, but no society."[32] He is acutely aware of the impact of his intuition of friendship, but he continues to entertain the unrealizable dream of perfect friendship. He simply does not will for friendship that is anything less than ideal. "Clearly," Philip Cafaro observes, "Thoreau is not writing about friendship as it typically exists but about Friendship: an ideal that our particular friendships may more or less approximate."[33] The universal or the "form" of friendship is primary. "We may and should sacrifice the real individual to the superior idealization."[34] What is unclear is how that "sacrifice" might take place.

Why not embrace friendship with others as they are and not as he wishes them to be? The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is friendship's potential threat to Thoreau's autonomy. In his *Journal* he writes candidly, "I hate that my motive for visiting a friend should be that I want society; that it should lie in my poverty and weakness, and not in his and my riches and strength. His friendship should make me strong enough to do without him."[35] The vulnerability of a relationship terrifies Thoreau. Love may cost him his treasured autonomy. The following passage from the *Journal* shows well the tension he lives in between the moral imagination's desire for human interaction with persons as they are and the idyllic imagination's preoccupation with an unachievable ideal of a "true" and essentially sentimental friendship:

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> How far we can be apart and yet attract each other! There is one who almost wholly misunderstands me and whom I too probably misunderstand, toward whom, nevertheless, I am distinctly drawn. . . . I am so much and so exclusively the friend of my friend's virtue that I am compelled to be silent for the most part, because his vice is present. . . . I only desire sincere relations with the worthiest of my acquaintance.[36]

Thoreau longs for what he intuitively knows only human friendship can offer, but he will not relent. He lacks the quality of will necessary to hold his idyllic dreams at bay and pursue friendship that is real. The same journal entry continues with the tragedy introduced in *A Week*. Unlike the masses of those speaking of friendship, Thoreau believes that he has achieved a truer definition. In his everyday life, though, he senses a significant disconnect between his imaginative vision of friendship and his experience of it:

> How happens it that I find myself making such an enormous demand on men and so constantly disappointed? Are my friends aware how disappointed I am? Is it all my fault? Have I no heart? Am I incapable of expansion and generosity? I shall accuse myself of everything else sooner. . . . My friend so treats me that I feel a thousand miles off; like the greatest possible stranger, speaking a different language; as if it would be the fittest thing in the world for us to be introduced."[37]

After this passage, Thoreau compares himself to a cuttlefish, which clouds or darkens the water around it in order to hide, but through all this darkness there remains a peculiar light. Both Thoreau and Emerson acknowledge, though in no explicit or systematic fashion, that there is always more to a human person than what can be said about them. Thoreau comes close when he writes: "The language of Friendship is not words, but meanings. It is an intelligence above language. . . . Acquaintances may come and go, and have a word ready for every occasion; but what puny word: shall he utter whose very breath is thought and meaning?"[38] There is something more to one's friend than what can be written about or verified by the senses. In Emerson and Thoreau's attempts to articulate an ideal friendship, they revealed in their own way what might be called a more "idealistic" friendship. They did not achieve a more comprehensive anthropology by outlining and clinging to an unachievable ideal, but their shortcomings exposed an instructive underlying awareness. Something transcendent in man—in the other and in one's self—made others valuable and made themselves more valuable. This may have been why Thoreau and many others in New England opposed slavery as vehemently as they did and why Thoreau spent so much time on the subject. Indeed, his brother John remained something of a friend long after the family had buried him. John, in life and death, was always more to Thoreau than

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what the latter could articulate. Perhaps this is why John, arguably the most important character (other than Thoreau) of *A Week*, is never described and barely mentioned.

"Society"

Friendship, as a concept, is not necessarily the same as "Society." Presumably, one shares society with one's friends, regardless of definition. But how can Thoreau have society with a myriad of abstractions whom he prefers to avoid? He begins to reflect on the importance of society in his first public lecture on April 11, 1838, entitled, conveniently, "Society."[39] Scraps of the lecture survive in his *Journal* from that same March. Thoreau begins by asking if the Aristotelian maxim that, "man was made for society," has been corrupted from its original meaning. Alternatively, and "in order to preserve its significance," Thoreau suggests that he "write it anew, so that properly it will read, Society was made for man."[40] More precisely, Thoreau might argue, society was made for the *best* man instead of the lower sort to which it currently conforms: "The mass never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest. As the reformers say, it is a leveling down, not up. Hence the mass is only another name for the mob. The inhabitants of the earth assembled in one place would constitute the greatest mob."[41]

For Thoreau, what typically passes for "society" is something inauthentic, insincere, and more an exercise in conformity than in friendship among individuals. He writes that "despairing of a more perfect intercourse, or perhaps never dreaming that such is desirable, or at least possible, we are contented to act our part in what deserves to be called the great farce, not drama, of life, like pitiful and mercenary stock actors whose business it is to keep up the semblance of a stage."[42] Friendship and society in any form less than the ideal invokes a sense of futility to which we tend to respond with complacency and conformity.

This first lecture is not necessarily intended as an attack on society or as the engendering of misanthropy. Thoreau is seeing *through* society, and longing for a truer society in which individual character and responsibility is neither consumed by nor tempted toward conformity. "Let not society be the element in which you swim, or are tossed about at the mercy of the waves, but be rather a strip of firm land running out into the sea, whose base is daily washed by the tide, but whose summit only the spring tide can reach."[43] Like his concepts of political morality and freedom, though, his understanding of friendship and society render politics and even the most meager community nearly impossible. Though he longs for community, the society and friendship he ultimately desires are, at their core, idyllic. Community requires inconvenience, sacrifice, selflessness, and dependency. Far from degrading

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humanity or eschewing sincerity, community finds its fulfillment by holding in tension the very elements Thoreau places at odds—the claims of the individual and those of the community. Instead of navigating such a tension, which emerges throughout Thoreau's work, he would attempt to "resolve" the problem with abstractions. When these same claims experience opposition from a government, though, something different is called for. If Thoreau's ideal friendship and community could not be realized, what chance did any government have for legitimacy—especially for one which tolerated slavery? Thoreau's response to the disappointment with human community takes on a more radical significance over time. If the company of humans has failed to live up to his ideal, why not look to the nonhuman world instead?

NOTES

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friend," in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 12 vols., Fireside Edition, (Boston and New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1909*)*,vol. 2, *Essays*, *First Series*, p. 70.
2. Emerson, "Friend," p. 70
3. Emerson, "Friend," p. 71.
4. Emerson, "Friend," p. 77.
5. Emerson, "Friend," p. 72.
6. Emerson, "Friend," pp. 72–73.
7. Emerson, "Friend," p. 77
8. Emerson, "Friend," p. 73.
9. Emerson, "Friend," p. 77.
10. Richardson rightly draws out this comparison with Göethe in his intellectual biography. Richardson, (1986) pp. 28–30, 156.
11. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 171.
12. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," pp. 171–72.
13. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 172.
14. "What is commonly honored with the name of Friendship is no very profound or powerful instinct. Men do not, after all, love their Friends greatly. I do not often see the farmers made seers and wise to the verge of insanity by their Friendship for one another. They are not often transfigured and translated by love in each other's presence. I do not observe them purified, refined, and elevated by the love of a man." Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 172.
15. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. 1, June 9, 1850, p. 33.
16. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 174.
17. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 174.
18. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 174.
19. David M. Robinson, *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2004) p. 66.
20. Robinson, (2004) p. 66.
21. Quoted in Bradley P. Dean's introduction to "Letter Eleven," Thoreau to H. G. O. Blake, September 1852, *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, ed. by Bradley P. Dean, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004) p. 67.
22. Thoreau himself never married, but he had once loved a visitor to Concord, Ellen Sewell, whom he unsuccessfully asked to marry. Ellen's visit in the summer of 1839 seems to have caused most eligible bachelors in the town to court her. Both John and Henry proposed to her after returning from their trip down the Concord and Merrimack rivers in early September. Thoreau had proposed to Ellen via letter, but her dad instructed her to decline. According to Richardson "he never again let himself fall in love with an eligible woman. Ellen was the one

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real love of his life, and whatever crusty remarks about women and marriage may have got copied down, he told his sister, when he was dying and the subject of Ellen Sewell came up, 'I have always loved her.'" Richardson, (1986) p. 62.

23. Henry David Thoreau, "Letter Eleven, Enclosure I," to H. G. O. Blake, September 1852, ed. by Dean, (2004) p. 71.

24. Thoreau, "Letter Eleven, Enclosure I," to H. G. O. Blake, September 1852, ed. by Bradley P. Dean, (2004) pp. 71–72.

25. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 173.

26. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," pp. 172–73.

27. Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994) p. 22.

28. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 175.

29. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 173.

30. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," pp. 175–76.

31. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 172.

32. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. VI, July 19, 1851, p. 316.

33. Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau's Living Ethics:* Walden *and the Pursuit of Virtue*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2004) p. 129.

34. Cafaro, (2004) p. 129.

35. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. III, ch. 5, February 14, 1852, p. 304.

36. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. IV, ch. 1, August 24, 1852, pp. 313–14.

37. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. IV, ch. 1, August 24, 1852, p. 313.

38. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Wednesday," p. 176.

39. This was also, significantly, around the same time that he began writing about Friendship, and many of the passages from these years found their way into the "Wednesday" chapter of *A Week*.

40. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 2, March 14, 1838, p. 36.

41. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 2, March 14, 1838, pp. 36–37.

42. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 2, March 14, 1838, p. 39.

43. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 2, March 14, 1838, p. 40.

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III

Environmental Political Thought in the Aftermath of Thoreau

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Chapter Six

Thoreau and the Arcadian Longing

Henry David Thoreau's legacy for environmentalism emerges not simply from a few key quotes about nature and his time spent at Walden, but from his thought as a whole. His imagination of friendship, human nature, morality, and freedom structure what will emerge as a major foundation for the modern environmental imagination.

The relationship and intellectual lineage between Thoreau and environmentalism though, is not necessarily obvious. Thoreau's twentieth-century heirs do not find in his work the outline of a political program or a philosophy of governance. Instead, environmentalists discover in Thoreau a unifying vision of the good, the true, and, the beautiful that is seemingly consistent with their social and political goals. Thoreau awakens readers to see the human and nonhuman world, not so much through the filter of abstract ideas and reason, but by imagination.

Describing this legacy calls for a more systematic framework for constructing lineages from Thoreau to environmentalism. Thoreau himself already resists such systematic boundaries, and later environmentalists often see historical lineages as something to lament—as pathways back to the destructive anthropocentrism they wish to resist. Nevertheless, environmental historians and literary scholars have done much to make these connections more explicit.

In order to build an intellectual bridge from Thoreau, and in light of the working theory of imagination, the analysis again benefits from the work of Irving Babbitt. To his credit and foresight, Babbitt, recognized at the beginning of the twentieth century how important the moral-idyllic tension had become for understanding man's relationship to the natural, nonhuman world. In *Rousseau and Romanticism,* he devotes an entire chapter to the Romantic view of nature and its importance for (and primarily as a threat to)

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Western culture. Babbitt's concerns in this regard are instructive and remain insightful. Few captured the depth of the idyllic environmental imagination as a literary and cultural phenomenon as early as he did.

According to Babbitt, the Romantics of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as their heirs at the turn of the twentieth century, exhibited three primary tendencies in their reflections regarding nature. He refers to these tendencies as the "Arcadian longing," the "pursuit of the dream woman" or the search for an "ideal companion," and an "aspiration toward the infinite." Such temptations characterize the idyllic environmental imagination in many of its manifestations and could have unfortunate consequences for humans and nonhumans

Babbitt first laments, though, that "one of the most disquieting features of the modern movement is the vagueness and ambiguity of its use of the word nature and the innumerable sophistries that have resulted."[1] Though nearly a hundred years removed from the twenty-first century's circumstances, Babbitt's concern is no less true today. "Nature" can mean anything and risks irrelevance by its very ambiguity. In an older sense, drawing on Ancient Greece, Rome, and Medieval Christianity, "Nature" could mean whatever the "normal" conception of *human* nature was at the time.[2] Today, however, "Nature" is increasingly interpreted as what is *not*—human. Babbitt observes that: "Any study of [Nature] must evidently turn on the question how far at different times and by different schools of thought the realm of man and the realm of nature . . . have been separated and in what way, and also how far they have been run together and in what way. For there may be different ways of running together man and nature."[3] This locates the question of what one means by "nature" precisely in the imagination and identifies the most fundamental issue as one that is not resolved purely by rightly ordered reason or will (though these certainly play an important part) but by a rightly ordered imagination. After all, the extent to which the "realm of man" and the "realm of nature" are run together occurs *first* in imagination. How humans understand the relationship between themselves and the nonhuman world is a product of the experiences, media, creative works of art, film, and literature which inform one's intuitive sense of reality.

Given the formidable diversity of definitions then, this study will, unless otherwise noted, use the word "nature" to mean the nonhuman world of plants, animals, and all other tangible aspects of land, air and, water.[4] Babbitt's description of the idyllic imagination relative to nature illustrates why the difficulty in defining "nature" is both challenging and, in the wrong hands, a potentially dangerous endeavor.

While Babbitt can provide something of an organizational framework to the analysis, he lacked a more positive understanding of what a moral imagination of nature might look like. Phrases like "Arcadian longing," are meant by Babbitt as criticisms. Thoreau will not be shielded from such critical

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scrutiny, nor will his environmentalist heirs. To supplement Babbitt, though, the critical sections below need to be followed by a more constructive outline about what the moral environmental imagination might look like.

The first category of Babbitt's criticism is what he calls the "Arcadian Longing." Such a disposition emerges out of conflict between reality and fantasy in which the world of the human is rejected in favor of the solace, love, and understanding in the nonhuman world. There, man finds companionship and understanding not found in the company of other human beings.[5] Yet one may, against Babbitt, protest what reads like an assault on the common love humans have with spending time "out-of-doors." Does Babbitt object to backpacking, camping, or similar activities? Must humans have only a cold and "objective" encounter with nature? Babbitt, anticipating this objection, writes:

> In its proper place all this refining on man's relation to the "outworld" may be legitimate and delightful; but that place is secondary. My quarrel is only with the aesthete who assumes an apocalyptic pose and gives forth as a profound philosophy what is at best only a holiday or week-end view of existence. No distinction is more important for any one who wishes to maintain a correct scale of values than that between what is merely recreative and what ministers to leisure. There are times when we may properly seek solace and renewal in nature, when we may invite both our souls and our bodies to loaf. The error is to look on these moments of recreation and relief from concentration on some definite end as in themselves the consummation of wisdom.[6]

The issue, then, is one of proportion. There is no reason to disparage a love for recreation and time spent outdoors. Babbitt maintains the view prevalent in the late nineteenth century, and in Thoreau's work, that there is something fundamentally restorative about a "return to nature," though Babbitt's "return" is decidedly temporary. A temptation to turn these temporary retreats into a permanent escape remains. Nature offers the idyllic imagination not simply renewal but salvation and a permanent separation from other persons, moral effort, civilization, and the cultivation of one's character. Alternatives to "Arcadia" are viewed with disdain, as less real or even immoral. The challenges of everyday life outside of Arcadia are viewed as a deformation of the way things ought to be. For one overcome by an Arcadian longing, the nonhuman world is loved over and above the human. There is no imperfection in the landscape except those introduced by mankind. One must seek out these remnants of Arcadia before humans corrupt all of it. Man lives an unnatural life in which he is "born free but is everywhere in chains," to quote Rousseau. Arcadia, on the other hand, accepts you as you are and allows you to be more free and natural.

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THOREAU IN ARCADIA

Throughout his life, Thoreau lived in a tension between being overcome by the Arcadian longing and resisting it. He was by no means alone in this disposition as the population grew in rural Massachusetts and industrialization made its way to Concord. The inevitable sense of loss that came with economic and demographic changes (particularly due to the Great Irish Potato Famine of 1845–1852) was felt by Thoreau and his neighbors from all walks of life. Some individuals responded by establishing utopian communities in protest, such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands, which Thoreau never participated in. Thoreau did, however, respond in his own way with regular afternoon hikes, by taking up a surveying business to explore the land around Concord, with multiple excursions to the forests of Maine and the shores of Cape Cod, and in his twenty-six-month sojourn to Walden Pond.

The Arcadian longing manifests itself early in Thoreau's work, making an appearance in his 1836 review of William Howitt's *Book of the Seasons* (1831). Thoreau writes that "No one, perhaps, possesses materials for happiness in such abundance, or has the sources of contentment and pure enjoyment so completely under his thumb, as the lover of Nature. Her devotee is never alone. . . . This love is universal, it is emphatically *natural*."[7] The "lover of Nature" is not disappointed, and his love does not go unrequited.

In an even clearer manifestation of the Arcadian longing, Thoreau observes at the end of the same paragraph that "We find that no region is so barren or so desolate as not to afford some human being a home. But Nature's home is everywhere, and in whatever clime, her devotee is at home with her."[8] To use the word "home," in this sense, implies a permanence out of proportion with a less idyllic vision of the natural world. Thoreau lives as a kind of "Arcadian exile" while at Harvard and generally stays indoors, temporarily separated from the sanctuary where he belongs. Yet he also cautions against exaggerating the qualities of nature beyond what one actually encounters. "Nature is not made after such a fashion as we would have her. We piously exaggerate her wonders as the scenery around our home."[9] In apparent reverence one may elevate even his own yards to an Arcadia, but he must not forget that such "wonders" are not human creations, even if his imagination of them is.

Several years later, Thoreau completed his "A Natural History of Massachusetts," which is less a conventional natural history than a mixture of observations and reflections on nature. Here emerges one of Thoreau's most explicit demonstrations of the Arcadian longing. He declares that "In society you will not find health, but in nature. Unless our feet at least stood in the midst of nature, all our faces would be pale and livid. Society is always diseased, and the best is the most so. There is no scent in it so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as the life-

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everlasting high pastures."[10] Nature is no longer viewed merely as a home for life's resources, but is perceived as preferable to human society. In one of Thoreau's infamous temptations to misanthropy, he finds nature to be superior to civilization. In a letter to his close friend Harrison Blake, he writes:

> I visit some new hill or pond or wood many miles distant. I am astonished at the wonderful retirement through which I move, rarely meeting a man in these excursions, never seeing one similarly engaged, unless it be my companion, when I have one. I cannot help feeling that of all the human inhabitants of nature hereabouts, only we two have leisure to admire and enjoy our inheritance.[11]

He both recommends and practices an escape from society. However, he is willing to allow a companion to accompany him on these sojourns. Thoreau could not, despite popular perception (brought on partly by his own rhetoric), always "escape" alone. There was something about nature that must be shared, which should come as no surprise given Thoreau's views on friendship. None of Thoreau's peers in Concord offered a more sustained reflection on friendship than Thoreau and it would be difficult to maintain that *the* defining characteristic of his nature writings was a consistent misanthropy.

A more distinctive theme in Thoreau's nature writings, and parallel to the Arcadian longing, was his notion of "wildness" as a particular understanding of freedom. The "wild" is that which is novel, mysterious, and resistant to order and conformity. It is a quality of eschewing civilization, cultivation, domesticity, and tradition in favor of a radical moral autonomy. "Whatever has not come under the sway of man is wild," Thoreau asserts. "In this sense original and independent men are wild— not tamed and broken by society."[12] The wild, in other words, must be individual and uninhibited.

While the moral imagination, over time, would reign in and moderate Thoreau's more ambitious claims for wilderness and wildness, he nevertheless tended to place "Wild" on a pedestal above the civilization, restraint, and order intolerable to freedom. In *A Week* his self-examination exposes a tendency toward the more idyllic imagination and an Arcadian longing. "There is in my nature . . ." he writes, "a singular yearning toward all wildness. I know of no redeeming qualities in myself but a sincere love for some things, and when I am reproved I fall back on to this ground."[13] He resists an excess of civilization and its characteristic subjection of moral autonomy to tradition and necessity. Native Americans, for example, are not "improved" by cultivation; nor is an agricultural "return to the land" sufficient for achieving the kind of independence which wildness provides. "It is true," he admits, "there are the innocent pleasures of country life, and it is sometimes pleasant to make the earth yield her increase, and gather the fruits in their season; but the heroic spirit will not fail to dream of remoter retirements and more rugged paths."[14] In *Walden* he recommends that this resistance to civilization be

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made manifest by leaving tracts of the United States in a "wild" or "primitive" condition. This act, along with living an economically simpler lifestyle, would move America toward a greater authenticity, freedom, and redemption.[15]

Thoreau's idyllic environmental imagination reaches its peak in his essay, "Walking," which was first delivered as a lecture at the Concord Lyceum on April 23, 1851. This work has been pivotal to twentieth-century environmentalism and the wilderness movement.[16] According to historian Roderick Nash, "Walking" "cut the channels in which a larger portion of thought about wilderness subsequently flowed."[17] For centuries, "wildness" and "nature" were often associated with sin and what was lowest in man. Thoreau was turning this tradition on its head by pronouncing that which was wild and natural to be more free and good. He was also, in a way, departing from his fellow transcendentalists. A key belief for Emerson, in particular, was that the reality above and beyond natural objects was more real than the objects themselves. Nature's importance drew from its ability to point toward this higher reality. Thoreau, on the other hand, sought to appreciate Nature in itself—as something of value regardless of a transcendent reality it may or may not point to. While this moved him in the direction of the moral imagination's synthesis of the universal and the particular, it is not clear exactly what the universal is that nature participated in. This is, in part, why Thoreau tends toward a kind of pantheism and an "aspiration toward the infinite" as described in chapter 8. Whatever the universal was, "the wilderness, in contrast to the city, was regarded as the environment where spiritual truths were least blunted."[18] The world of politics and even friendship were disappointing at best. Community could hardly provide access to the universal. And as Roderick Nash observes, "[t]he development of Thoreau's wilderness philosophy is most meaningful when juxtaposed to this sense of discontent with his society."[19] He finds in nature the freedom, companionship, resources, and spirituality he fails to find in civilization. He begins "Walking," claiming:

> I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that.[20]

The defenders of civilization need to be resisted or at least balanced by a defender of wildness as "absolute freedom." Specifically, wildness is defended by "Walkers:" free, uninhibited individuals who roam physically, imaginatively, and spiritually away from domestic life, society, and the obligations of community. *Where* he or she walks though is better if it is not only

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wild, but shared. Thoreau laments the fences and private property that inhibits the walkers, and he fears a day will come when the greatest lands nature has to offer will be reserved for the few rather than for all. In anticipation of the twentieth-century wilderness movement, then, he writes: "To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude your-self from the true enjoyment of it. Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come."[21]

Boundaries and restrictions are sure to impede the Walkers. For now, Thoreau encourages walking in submission to Nature's "subtle magnetism . . . which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright."[22] One does not walk simply anywhere, but everywhere that Nature would guide her. Given the vast opportunities to encounter large tracts of undeveloped land in America, the depths to which Nature may lead the Walker physically, intellectually, and spiritually seem infinite. Then, when he is ready, the Walker will realize Thoreau's most influential dictum: "that in Wildness is the preservation of the World."[23] America grows and survives by means of its westward expansion, religious figures find inspiration in the wilderness and the very Roman Empire was founded by the wildness of Romulus suckled by a wolf. Rome fell when it abandoned its wild roots. "Life consists with wildness," he writes "The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him."[24] Civilization, meanwhile, represses life and limits human potential. Wilderness inspires poets and philosophers,[25] cultivates diversity,[26] enriches the best of literature and even sustained the great civilizations of the Western world.[27] "In short, all good things are wild and free."[28]

For Thoreau, the tension between the moral and idyllic imagination continues to complicate his overall vision of the wild. As he observes, the natural does not aspire to the cultivation of the civilization nor does the civilization aspire to become wild. As an alternative, civilization and the wild ought to achieve a seamless unity. Nature is civilized, and true civilization is at home in nature. Man's art is not the cultivation and perfection of nature, but submission to it. Perhaps this explains why Thoreau would write in *Walden* that "The civilized man is a more experienced and wiser savage."[29] Thoreau's play with "savage" and "civilized" carries a poignant message. For Thoreau, the promises of civilization have been shallow at best. Man improves his science and industry, but not his soul. Eric Voegelin once posed the question of how "civilization can advance and decline at the same time."[30] Nearly a century earlier, Thoreau had considered the same possibility: "While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings."[31]

Reflecting on the inability of the "civilized man" to adequately improve on the "savage," explains, in part, Thoreau's purpose in living at Walden Pond and writing the account which effectively immortalized him. One

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would suspect this famous moment to be a quintessential example of an "Arcadian imagination." Thoreau's account of his stay, however, does not substantiate such a simple explanation. The Arcadian longing is a desire for a more permanent escape in Nature from everyday life, away from people and in the presence of a benevolent and loving natural environment. However, the narrative evinces less of this Arcadian temptation than expected. Compared to Thoreau's other writings, *Walden* has very little to say about nonhuman nature. It is, among many other things, an experiment, a cultural critique, a moral philosophy, and an autobiography. Thoreau regularly took walks into town and entertained many guests. As he writes in the "Visitors" chapter of *Walden*: "I think I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way. I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither."[32] Still, the temptation to ascribe nonexistent qualities to Nature remains:

> I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very patterning of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.[33]

Here, the idyllic imagination briefly gets the best of Thoreau. His experiment of "fronting only the essentials of life," of living simply and deliberately and inquiring what civilization's advance has meant for the decline of the soul, are subordinated to the idealization of wild Nature as not simply Arcadia, but as a kind of ideal companion or as a parent.

Significantly, Thoreau never advocated a complete retreat from civilization: "I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports."[34] Instead, he believed the juxtaposition and moderation of both extremes—civilization and wilderness—was necessary for the fullest realization of human community and happiness. In *A Week* he observes that, "The wilderness is near as well as dear to every man. Even the oldest villages are indebted to the border of wild wood which surrounds them, more than to the gardens of men. There is something indescribably inspiriting and beautiful in the aspect of the forest skirting and occasionally

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jutting into the midst of new towns."[35] Juxtaposing the village with a surrounding wilderness, he disparages neither. The contrast seems *necessary*. Thoreau only emphasizes the wild because it has historically been neglected or misunderstood. It is as if "Athens" and "Arcadia" require one another for a full self-understanding. "Arcadia" though, in an historical sense, was an idyllic place, but to describe it as "wilderness" may be a stretch. Thoreau blurs the lines between civilized and uncivilized, and turns the distinctions between "Athens" and "Arcadia" on their head. He offers a very similar perspective in *Walden*:

> Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness. . . . At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable . . . unsurveyed and unfathomed. . . . We can never have enough of nature.[36]

Man finds meaning and life in an awareness of his relative insignificance and limitations. Mystery gives meaning to knowledge, the unexplored gives value to the explored and the wild gives purpose to the civilization. Thoreau himself illustrated this in the "Bean-Field" chapter of *Walden*, describing his small plot of beans as "the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields; as some states are civilized, and others half-civilized, and others savage or barbarous, so my field was, though not in a bad sense, a half-cultivated field."[37] The tension between wild and the civilized, which equates to the tension between the idyllic and moral, manifests itself in our towns, art, politics, and culture. Most importantly, it occurs within each individual. "I found in myself," Thoreau writes, "and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good."[38]

Can the wild be called *good*, though? Thoreau emphasized the notion of wilderness as a kind of "raw material" of life,[39] and disputed ancient traditions of equating the wild with sin. But when Thoreau journeyed to the vast, undeveloped wilderness of Maine, the encounter reminded him that civilization may not be entirely problematic. Once one encounters wilderness on this scale, Thoreau recognized, "one could no longer accuse institutions and society, but must front the true source of evil."[40] As he ascends Mount Ktaadn, wildness seems to impose rather than liberate his thoughts. The encounter is disorienting, intimidating, and humbling. Nature is neither the ideal companion nor the Arcadia that Thoreau wrote about from the comforts of Concord:

> Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains. She seems to say sternly, Why came ye here before your time. This

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> ground is not prepared for you. Is it not enough that I smile in the valleys? I have never made this soil for thy feet, this air for thy breathing, these rocks for thy neighbors. I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I am kind. Why seek me where I have not called thee, and then complain because you find me but a stepmother? Shouldst thou freeze or starve, or shudder thy life away, here is no shrine, nor altar, nor any access to my ear.[41]

Thoreau's imaginative perception of the wild has been challenged or even shattered. Yet he recognizes the irony that by invading the wilderness, wildness is somehow corrupted. "Wilderness" is an abstract idea and implies a purity that man never actually encounters. The encounter itself would violate the very idea. Nature, and especially "Wild" nature, may not be the benevolent source of freedom and love he once imagined:

> It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast and drear and inhuman, though in the midst of cities. Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. . . . This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the un-handseled globe. . . . There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man.[42]

Thoreau's experience in Maine reinforced and reoriented the half-savage, half-cultivated ideal he had begun to articulate in earlier works. There was now more respect for civilization's possibilities and limitations, as there was a greater realization of the wild's limitations and mystery. As Simon Schama writes, "There have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic."[43] The awesomeness of vast, undeveloped, and mysterious land has a way of evoking humility and the moral imagination. Far from becoming an escape from human society, it reminds us that we require the presence of others. Still, Thoreau remained adamant about the possibilities of the wild. The idyllic and moral imagination required each other for their own awareness. Both affirm and resist one another, and sharpen that which they express.

In sum, the idyllic imagination tends toward an Arcadian longing that is characterized by a disproportionate love toward the natural, nonhuman world and specifically as an escape from disappointing human society. Nature, and specifically that which is *Wild*,[44] affords man a truer community and sanctuary. Time spent in the forest is more than merely restorative and inspiring; it is nearly heaven-on-earth. The meadow and the valley become Arcadian paradises, removed from the demands of moral effort and life among other persons. The moral imagination does not lose sight of Arcadia's beauty and mystery, however. The encounter with Nature is still evocative, engendering creativity, curiosity, and humility. The moral imagination requires, however,

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that such an encounter be subjected to proportion and an attentiveness to reality. In this way, the moral environmental imagination neither idealizes Nature as Arcadia, nor dismisses the evocative encounter with nature as mere romanticism. Instead, the moral environmental imagination is prepared to encounter universal beauty and order in the particular landscape, place, animal, plant, body of water, and so on. Finally, like Thoreau's departure from Walden and his intimidating experience on the top of Ktaadn, the moral imagination recognizes that man was not meant to remain in Arcadia forever.

A major concern of this study is how the actual and potential impact of the tension in Thoreau's imagination influenced environmental thought and politics. Beginning with the problem of the Arcadian longing and the concept of "Wildness," the political consequences of Thoreau's imagination of the natural nonhuman world can be read alongside his imagination of political morality, friendship, freedom, law, and government.

A preliminary word about environmentalism is required though. Since the turn of the twentieth century, American environmentalism has acquired an impressive diversity of perspectives and personalities. To speak of environmentalism as a consistently unified movement would be historically and philosophically dishonest. While concern for the natural, nonhuman world is its overall focus, the depth and intensity of that concern, its sources, the response to it, and the corresponding beliefs about human nature, democracy, survival, and religion lack consistency. This struggle for identity is in part a manifestation of the tension between the idyllic and moral imagination. Environmentalism lives in a tension between the idyllic and moral imagination, and it is Thoreau, more than anyone else, who has given that tension a vocabulary and a voice. Lawrence Buell observes that "no writer in the literary history of America's dominant subculture comes closer than [Thoreau] to standing for nature in both the scholarly and popular mind."[45] Though Thoreau was by no means the only major influence on modern American environmentalism, the movement's search for self-understanding will find, and has already discovered, considerable value in this peculiar man of Concord.

WILDERNESS AND THE ARCADIAN LONGING

The problem of the "Arcadian longing" and Thoreau's concept of "wildness" have significant parallels in modern environmental politics and thought, and especially in the wilderness movement of the mid-twentieth century. One of the first problems in Thoreau's legacy for the politics of wilderness, though, is the appeal of "wildness" as the preferred characterization of freedom. The wild is uninhibited and uncivilized. There is little room for a restraining

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ethical will or for attention to expediency and tradition. Yet it is that same wildness which is at the root of threats to wilderness. Westward expansion in the nineteenth-century United States, for example, was often characterized more by anarchy than by order. Uninhibited by a rule of law or by the trappings of a civilized society, great tracts of land were taken over, land was overfarmed or overgrazed, great herds of Bison were decimated, forestry was unregulated, and many scenic landscapes and trails were exploited by local entrepreneurs. Undeveloped land was abused, fought over, and under-valued. Such lack of restraint is characteristic of an idyllic imagination which rejects limitations and moderation. While wildness elevates an abstract autonomy, the moral imagination strives to navigate the difficult tension between liberty and restraint without abandoning either. Freedom, as such, is not the problem, but a freedom characterized by wildness drives the immoderate use and abuse of the very land that the wilderness movement seeks to protect. While Thoreau seems to recognize the need for restraint in his opposition to the Mexican-American War and his advocacy in *Walden* for simpler living, the elevation of wildness and his enthusiasm for John Brown's lack of restraint demonstrate a significant tension which would be inherited by later environmentalists.

Jack Turner observed a similar problem after noting how many writers have misquoted Thoreau as saying "In *Wilderness* is the preservation of the world." Turner worries "that mistaking wilderness for wildness is one cause of our increasing failure to preserve the wild earth."[46] Many readers interpret Thoreau as equating "wilderness" and "wildness" because they never stop to ask what Thoreau meant by "wildness" or even "world." Turner tries to remedy this confusion by looking closer at Thoreau's own etymology of "wild" and "world" and concludes that Thoreau's influential phrase, "is about the relation of free, self-willed, and self-determinate 'things' with the harmonious order of the cosmos."[47] Still, it's not immediately clear how the "wild" and a "harmonious order" might be realized.

This confusion emerges, in Turner's estimation, out of a lack of direct human experience with "wild, nonhuman nature." Contemporary discourse about "nature" and the "wild" lack the rich insight of distinct engendering experiences. Even Thoreau's readers, who often claim to have had such experiences, seem to be unaware of what he actually meant. Indeed, it is curious how little Thoreau writes about preserving the wild which he insists will preserve the world. Perhaps this oversight is due to the observation that those who live closest to the natural nonhuman world seem much less inclined to champion environmental causes than those who reside in urban areas.[48]

This conflict mirrors well the tension of the environmental imagination and the Arcadian longing. On the one hand are those from the cities with limited exposure to the natural, nonhuman world. Their view of nature is

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more abstract, rooted in sentiments inspired by brief periods of recreation and travel and by the experiences, art, and stories of others. Those with a more direct experience of the natural, nonhuman world seem less likely to idealize the environment in their imagination. "Nature" is not an abstraction, but something they work with, in and, perhaps, against every day. In both instances, Turner believes something is missing which was *not* missing in Thoreau.[49]

Turner, like Buell, appreciates the profound importance of a particular quality of imagination and will for the preservation of the environment. Creative works of imagination shape what one loves, and that love shapes what one protects. Yet Turner, for all his resistance to abstractions, only moves toward a more radical abstraction of "merging" more into the "larger patterns" of wildness.[50] Instead of the perspective of a tourist or farmer, humans must, according to Turner, adopt a more indigenous perspective in which our subjectivity is absorbed by dwelling more intimately with nature. "We are left with the vital importance of residency in wild nature," Turner asserts, "and a visceral knowledge of that wildness, as the most practical means of preserving the wild."[51] This is not the more moderate "loafing" and recreation Babbitt spoke of earlier, but is the dangerous movement toward running together the "realm of man" and the "realm of nature," making them virtually indistinguishable. "What we need now," Turner argues, "is a new tradition of the wild that teaches us how human beings live best by living in and studying the wild without taming it or destroying it."[52] This is neither the forbidding nature of Thoreau's *Maine Woods* nor the necessary contrast of "wild" and "civilized" he illustrates by his bean field at Walden Pond. Turner's imagination is the idyllic imagination taken to a dangerous and politically impracticable level.

Turner wrestles with the difficult question of how to define wilderness itself. A remarkable number of studies have participated in the debate surrounding the usefulness of wilderness as a concept, and several definitions have been offered. The most politically significant definition is that offered by the U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964, which states that, "A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." This wilderness must also have a "primeval character" where the "forces of nature" evince greater influence than the impact of man.[53]

The definition of "wilderness" in the Wilderness Act is the Arcadian longing writ large, and it would not be a stretch to refer to the legislation as the "Arcadian Act." In principle, the Wilderness Act would preserve those areas removed from both the presence and influence of man. Yes, humans can visit, but they are to do nothing that would seemingly upset the "forces of nature" or the wilderness area's "primeval character," "solitude," and the

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earth's "community of life." The very existence of such a law is quite striking. Instead of viewing nonhuman nature as something to be managed and overcome, it was given value in and of itself. While instrumental arguments for wilderness preservation initially carried the Wilderness Act to its successful passage, its continued defense and the debate surrounding its implementation have moved toward claims of nature having "rights" and to other more allegedly "ecocentric" arguments.[54]

The problem is that the entire concept of wilderness is premised on products of the idyllic imagination. That is, the wilderness act itself assumes a condition akin to a primitive "balance of nature," which operates as an ideal benchmark for environmental preservation and restoration. Like the "city in speech" of Socrates, the ideal of the wilderness movement and the Arcadian longing is an "ecosystem in speech" only. Eschewing both scientific opposition and historical reality, the concepts of "wilderness" and a "balance of nature" have acquired considerable currency and influence in public policy, culture, nature writing, and other works of the environmental imagination.[55] They are abstractions with a deeply entrenched ethical weight and legitimacy which often shield them from scrutiny.

IMAGINATION AND THE "BALANCE OF NATURE"

The notion of a "balance of nature" dates back to antiquity, according to Frank Egerton.[56] For most of its history, however, it was tied more to theological and philosophical generalizations, and did not become the property of natural history until the late eighteenth century. Though historically lacking a consistent and precise definition, the "balance of nature" has become something of a context and assumption for the environmental imagination and politics. Its most important popularizer was Rachel Carson, whose book, *Silent Spring* (1962), ignited much of the American environmental movement. According to Carson:

> The balance of nature is not the same today as in Pleistocene times, but it is still there: a complex, precise, and highly integrated system of relationships between living things which cannot safely be ignored. . . . The balance of nature is not a *status quo*; it is fluid, ever shifting, in a constant state of adjustment. Man, too, is part of this balance. Sometimes the balance is in his favor; sometimes—and all too often through his own activities—it is shifted to his disadvantage.[57]

Nature always seeks an equilibrium between life and death, abundance and scarcity, predator and prey, health and sickness. A precise outline of this balance would be historically impossible to pinpoint, but Carson asserts that the balance is real. Nature does its own part to manage this balance and, in

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the absence of human interference, would always succeed in achieving it. Man, however, with his distinctive free will and intellectual superiority, must choose whether to be a part of this balance or to disrupt it. The Arcadia of the environmental imagination is a delicate cosmion, susceptible to even moderate levels of consumption or selfishness.

While reading Carson, one wonders whether the only way to "balance" nature is to eliminate humanity altogether. While, at times, she is willing to admit that man can have a positive role in the "balance" of nature, he is more frequently guilty of acting on or within nature in ways that demonstrate considerable ignorance and impatience. Man is primarily destructive of the natural, nonhuman world and predominantly inclined to neglect instead of care. While Carson pays lip service to the potential benefits of technology, science, and agriculture, a fuller picture of man's positive role remains undeveloped. As Charles Rubin rightly observes:

> [Carson's] failure to tease out the various strands of that complexity is probably a net rhetorical gain. It makes it possible for there to be "man" and "destruction" on one side of the ledger, and "nature" and "danger" on the other side. Because there is no clear picture of when humans intervene properly in nature, Carson can maintain both her pessimism about a future "where no birds sing" and her optimism that the right science and the right agricultural technology can provide many of the benefits of existing pesticides without their grave costs.[58]

Carson's rhetorical success is considerable. She understood the importance of imagination and placed the ecological crises she identified within a larger context of everyday life. *Silent Spring*, cleverly dubbed a "murder mystery" by Rubin,[59] contained no original research on her part, but it imagined an ecological problem—the harmful effects of DDT—in a way that ignited a political and cultural movement. As Lawrence Buell noted, *Silent Spring* is the "least 'literary'" of Carson's books, "but the creative imagination is central to its effect."[60] Yet the *quality* of that imagination remains in the tension between the moral and idyllic. Carson's idyllic imagination tempts her toward a dangerous misanthropy and toward the misrepresentation of reality and previous research,[61] but the moral imagination prevents her from disparaging entirely of human intervention, science, and environmental well-being.

REWILDING

The Arcadian longing's inspiration for wilderness, wildness, and the idyllic "balance of nature," have left formidable questions as to man's role in that balance. As a possible way to conceive humanity's position in this regard,

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several authors have recommended the concept of "rewilding." If the wilderness act identified Arcadia, and the "balance of nature" conceptualizes Arcadia's character and justification, then rewilding brings all these pieces together in a radical rethinking of the way one lives. Rewilding officially entered the dictionary in 2011, but by then it was primarily associated with the reintroduction of plant and animal species to their native habitats or with the "rehabilitation . . . of entire ecosystems."[62] Today, in popular culture and marketing, the idea of rewilding is a way of overcoming one's alienation from the natural, nonhuman world by "resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way."[63] Nature "knows best," and requires little "help" from us. Applied to human life, then, George Monbiot—one of the more vocal popularizers of rewilding—looks to Thoreau as an example and claims to see rewilding as a way not to abandon civilization, but to enhance it. Quoting Thoreau, Monbiot explains that rewilding "is 'to love not man the less, but Nature more.'"[64] According to Monbiot, rewilding is not necessarily a return to primitive lifestyles and the abandonment of a complex economy, but rather a return to the "wildness" that Thoreau spoke of in "Walking." It is a self-willed, radically autonomous disposition that orders freedom to the impulses of nature. Apparent constraints on human freedom for the sake of ecological well-being are reimagined as freeing man from his tragically "unwilded" existence. While Monbiot is careful to avoid abstractions, misanthropy, and ideology, his entire notion of rewilding is the epitome of the idyllic imagination and the virtual abolition of morality. Indeed, more traditional moral restraints appear to be the very agents of human "unwilding." While part of this rewilding process is reintroducing native species back into the habitats where they once roamed, for man it means resisting the urge to control his own nature. Monbiot elaborates further explaining that "rewilding has no end points, no view about what a 'right' ecosystem or a 'right' assemblage of species looks like. . . . It lets nature decide."[65] Humanity is in nature's way and must step aside to let nature take its course. Rewilding becomes an end in itself with little justification beyond the assertion that it is "natural."

Another recent work by ecologist Marc Beckoff goes further than Monbiot, arguing that we must "rewild our hearts"[66] According to Beckoff, "we humans—big-brained, big-footed, overproducing, overconsuming, and invasive mammals—have for a long time acted as if we are the only animals who matter."[67] Humans have violently abused the planet and created problems that are too large to even understand. For Beckoff, the *feeling* that humans have created an ecological mess is far more authoritative than the data needed to prove its extent. Beckoff's imagining of rewilding acknowledges that humans and nonhuman animals are due an equal amount of dignity and respect, and that compassion and empathy for nonhumans is a moral obligation. Nonhumans can have worldviews and complex emotions, and must be

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granted the same respect as humans. Following Babbitt's description of the romantic view of nature, Beckoff writes, "When I mind animals . . . I practice what I consider 'deep ethology.' That is, as the 'seer,' I try to become the 'seen.' When I watch coyotes, I become coyote. When I watch penguins, I become penguin. I will also try to become tree and even rock."[68]

Beckoff claims that these moments of ecological empathy or "deep ethology," can provide key scientific insights. To achieve even wider acceptance and environmental well-being, more of these moments are called for, as is a revolution and a movement "based on peace, compassion, empathy, and social justice."[69] It is "sentimental humanitarianism" at the extreme. Yet if this rewilding of our hearts were to become a movement, "There is [to be] no 'membership.' Instead, we are all already members, as living, breathing human beings who move in circles of coexistence."[70] It would be a movement of an undifferentiated mass. Individualism is disparaged, liberty is a problem, and sentiment governs. In moments of doubt, those who can best achieve "deep ethology" and empathy will provide the best answers.

Beckoff's proposal, despite its radical nature, does not sit on the fringes of the idyllic environmental imagination. "Rewilding" is an increasingly popular premise among conservation biologists. Extensive efforts by the Rewilding Institute and the U.S. and Canadian governments, for example, are trying to link up wilderness areas and large tracts of land that can support larger numbers of native predators. In contrast to Monbiot's concept, Beckoff's rewilding is more willing to intervene in nature, especially in human nature. But this intervention will be unsuccessful if man does not establish a more personal connection to wildlife. This is by no means a new idea, as Lawrence Buell observes, since the notion of nature's "personhood" may go back to antiquity.[71] Today, "rewilding" is used in countless ad campaigns for environmental groups, is argued for in environmental lawsuits, and provides content for popular entertainment. The "running together" of the "realm of man" and the "realm of nature," as Babbitt described, is ubiquitous in works of the creative environmental imagination. Beckoff is only making explicit a sentiment implicit in the idyllic imaginations of modern marketing and modern films like James Cameron's *Avatar*.

RETHINKING WILDERNESS AND WILDNESS

Not all environmentalists are persuaded by the more idyllic preoccupation with "wilderness" and "wildness," particularly those who work in the burgeoning field of environmental history. One of the most visible and respected critics of the wilderness idea is environmental historian William Cronon. His 1996 article, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" offered a critical (if partially flawed) resistance to the more idyllic

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temptations of wilderness advocates, and set off a fiery debate among environmental scholars. Cronon argued that, far from being the antithesis of civilization, the notion of "wilderness" was entirely a product of civilization, and is itself fundamentally unnatural. This is not surprising, as the success of the wilderness idea "had to become loaded with some of the deepest core values of the culture that created and idealized it: it had to become sacred."[72] Wilderness became an object of reverence, and its defenders eschewed civilization in speech but retained much of the religious and cultural assumptions which characterize civilization itself. Far from preserving the wildness of wilderness, human sentiment and even worship of nature "tamed" the wild by giving it boundaries and definition. The movement that Roderick Nash emphasized, from the wilderness where Jesus was tempted to the "Cathedrals" of wilderness described by John Muir, did not make "wilderness" any more natural or less abstract and subjective. Cronon observes how the defenders of the wilderness idea tended to associate the wild with a kind of "frontier myth" of American origins and self-understanding, but this only exposed how little the wilderness idea was actually concerned with nature itself. "This nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life," Cronon observes, "inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented."[73] Though ostensibly nostalgic for something more "natural," the "frontier myth," was more concerned with disparaging all things urban, industrial, and "artificial."

Instead of valuing wilderness as such, the idea of wilderness followed Thoreau's idyllic imagination in celebrating the wild as that which is "not man" and "not modern." Furthermore, the wilderness idea was always more about preserving a *myth* than a place. This becomes clearer when one considers the wilderness movement's preoccupation with the notion of a "virgin wilderness," which ignored the importance of Native Americans and the considerable historical evidence contradicting the vision of pure and primitive America. For Cronon, the wilderness movement's paradoxical disdain for history is precisely what corrupts it:

> But the trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject. The flight from history that is very nearly the core of wilderness represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world. The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living. . . . Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.[74]

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Cronon rightly realizes that efforts of rewilding and the preservation of wilderness as a kind of moral, and even religious, imperative, exposes a deeper misanthropy that suggests the removal of humans from much of nature—if not their complete elimination—in order to remedy their contaminating presence. The preoccupation with wilderness also threatens to distract us from other areas, including our backyards or local parks that warrant the same protection. Far from discouraging the preservation and protection of large tracts of land from economic development, Cronon would encourage such efforts to continue with a different mindset. Instead of conceiving wilderness in terms of separating man from nature, humans ought to imagine man as a part of nature, while retaining a recognition that nonhumans will have interests and value independent of man. Yet even here, in Cronon's critique, which is animated by a moral imagination, we find an idyllic temptation to merge man and nature in problematic ways. He wants to "bring the wilderness home," but whether Arcadia is in a far-off land or in one's own backyard, the idealization remains problematic. While Cronon's critique is to be commended for exposing the fundamental contradictions and ideological implications of the wilderness idea, his opposition to a man-nature dualism risks the same ideological temptations.

One of the figures Cronon quotes approvingly in support of his critique is the author, farmer, and cultural critic Wendell Berry. Berry has long been associated with environmentalism, despite standing apart from its more dominant streams. His work tends toward a less idyllic view of nature, is less hostile to history, and explicitly resists the misanthropy, radicalism, and arrogance of the larger environmental movements. Though inspired by Thoreau, Berry's agricultural background, his faith, and his preoccupation with community and tradition tend to moderate the more problematic elements of Thoreau's romanticism.

In his 1985 essay, "Preserving Wildness," Berry works to distance himself both from those who claim to "speak for nature" and those who wish to conquer it. He does not wish to abandon the "dualism" that Cronon laments, nor does he want to encourage the abuse of the natural, nonhuman world. He seeks a middle ground between self-righteous "defenders of nature" and those who evince a more disenchanted, instrumental view of nature. One of the ways he accomplishes this is by redefining the wild in a manner more reminiscent of Thoreau's experience on Ktaadn, and less in line with "Walking." For Berry, the wild is that which is not under the control of human will. Despite the advances of science, this includes the majority of the present world. That world can be dangerous and unpredictable, and the mystery of the wild far exceeds what humans can claim to know about it. Living in harmony with the wild is possible and difficult, but overcoming the wild is not achievable, and attempts to do so threaten human well-being. "There is

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no escape from the human use of nature . . . human good cannot be simply synonymous with natural good."[75] After all, "we can only live at the expense of other lives."[76]

Following Thoreau's necessary dichotomy of civilized and wild, and in contrast to Cronon, Berry advocates thinking of the relationship between human nature neither as entirely separate nor entirely unified, but as both. Man is "in and not of" the natural world. Berry illustrates this reality by describing the human body as "half wild," in that our very life "is dependent upon reflexes, instincts, and appetites that we do not cause or intend and that we cannot, or had better not, stop."[77] While there are appetites and instincts which one can change and discipline, individuals do not will their hearts to beat, for example.

Berry agrees that the preservation of large tracts of "wild" uninhabited and undeveloped land is necessary, because the juxtaposition of civilization and wildness reminds humans of who they are, and that they are always *becoming*. For Berry, humans do not begin as fully human, but the deer is always fully a deer, and the tree is always fully a tree. Men and women must seek a fuller humanity by means of tradition, culture, and community. Part of that culture and tradition is learning how to live in harmony with the natural, nonhuman world—an insight that, prior to industrialized agriculture, was once more obvious to farmers than to others. Instead of rewilding, finding our place in a balance of nature or abandoning the distinction between man and nature, Berry argues for an environmental ethic that views the efforts of restraint, conservation, preservation, and responsible stewardship of the land as fundamental to a fully realized humanity.

There is very little, if any, of the Arcadian longing present in Berry's imagination of the natural, nonhuman world. Like Thoreau on Ktaadn or in the bean field on the shores of Walden Pond, Berry sees in the wilderness both beauty and death. Yet even Berry is tempted by the idyllic imagination in his idealization of local communities, primitive technology, the agricultural lifestyle, and a radically decentralized economy as the remedies for an "overspecialized," undisciplined, and irresponsible American culture. While he never advocates for the kind of utopian communities that Thoreau eschewed, Berry asserts an ahistorical vision of community which may be unrealistic given human nature. While Thoreau asserts the individual attuned to right as the moral ideal, Berry proposes the local community attuned to right and tradition as his ideal. Though Berry's vision is moderated somewhat by attention to history, his vision is only slightly less abstract than Thoreau's.

The Arcadian longing that Thoreau exemplifies in *A Week*, "Walking," and other essays is resisted by his experience on the summit of Ktaadn. The abstract ideals of "rewilding," wilderness and a "balance of nature" are resisted by an awareness of historical reality and a moral imagination attuned

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to actual human experience. As both Cronon and Berry demonstrate, the moral imagination is not the enemy of wilderness preservation and national parks, but these efforts will ultimately fail if they are grounded in the misanthropic and idyllic imagination animating influential sectors of modern environmentalism. A fully realized humanity is not "rewilded," removed from nature nor entirely merged with it. It strives for harmony with the nonhuman world, and is rewarded by the restorative experiences of beauty, awe, and wonder critical to the cultivation of humility and the moral imagination.

NOTES

1. Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, originally published in 1919, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009) p. 268.
2. Babbitt, (2009) p. 268.
3. Babbitt, (2009) p. 269.
4. The difficulty of defining "nature" is a perennial problem confronted by a number of scholars. Among the more comprehensive and historical discussions of "nature" are Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1998); Kate Soper, *What Is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); and Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1967). As Emerson once observed, Thoreau never defined "nature" himself, though that may have been intentional.
5. Babbitt, (2009) p. 279.
6. Babbitt, (2009) p. 289.
7. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 27. Emphasis in original.
8. Thoreau, *Early Essays*, (1975) p. 28.
9. Thoreau, *A Week* , p. 123.
10. Henry David Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," in *The Writings of Henry D. David Thoreau*: *Excursions*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) p. 4
11. Thoreau, *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, (2004) Letter to Harrison Blake, November 20, 1849, p. 49.
12. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. II, ch. 8, September 3, 1851, p. 448.
13. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Sunday," pp. 31–32.
14. Thoreau, *A Week*, "Sunday," pp. 32–33.
15. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) "Baker Farm," pp. 252–53.
16. The late executive director of the Wilderness Society and the primary author of the Wilderness Act, Howard Zahniser, constantly carried the writings of Thoreau as he campaigned for the protection of wilderness areas. See James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964*, (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012) p. 17. For more on Thoreau's direct connection to the wilderness movement in particular see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, vol. 1, no. 1, (January, 1996) pp. 7–28; Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1991); and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001).
17. Nash, (2001) p. 84.
18. Nash, (2001) p. 86.
19. Nash, (2001) p. 87.

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20. Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*: *Excursions*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2007) p. 185
21. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 195.
22. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 195.
23. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 202.
24. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 203.
25. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 206.
26. Thoreau, “Walking,” pp. 211–12.
27. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 206.
28. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 210.
29. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Economy,” p. 83.
30. Voegelin, (1952) p. 129.
31. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Economy,” p. 77. Emphasis in original.
32. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Visitors,” p. 185.
33. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Solitude,” p. 177.
34. Thoreau, “Walking,” p. 214.
35. Thoreau, *A Week*, “Monday,” p. 108.
36. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Spring,” p. 366.
37. Thoreau, *Walden*, “The Bean Field,” p. 203.
38. Thoreau, *Walden*, “Higher Laws,” p. 257.
39. Nash, (2001) p. 88.
40. Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, ed. by Joseph J. Moldenhauer, (Princeton: Princeton University, 2004) “Ktaadn,” p. 16.
41. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, “Ktaadn,” p. 64.
42. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, “Ktaadn,” p. 70.
43. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) p. 517.
44. Thoreau never explicitly defines “Nature” or “Wilderness.”
45. Buell, (1995) p. 2.
46. Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild*, (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1996) p. 81.
47. Turner, (1996) p. 82.
48. Turner, (1996) p. 83.
49. Turner, (1996) p. 89.
50. Turner. (1996) p. 90.
51. Turner, (1996) p. 90.
52. Turner, (1996) p. 90.
53. *The Wilderness Act*, 88th Congress, 2nd session, 1964, Public Law 88–577, (September 3, 1964).
54. Nash, (2001) pp. 385–89.
55. See, for example, Dennis E. Jelinski, “There Is No Mother Nature: There Is No Balance of Nature: Culture, Ecology and Conservation,” *Human Ecology*, vol. 33, no. 2, (April, 2005) pp. 271–288.
56. Frank N. Egerton, “Changing Concepts of the Balance of Nature,” *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 48, no. 2, (June, 1973), pp. 322–50.
57. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962) p. 246.
58. Charles T. Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Modern Environmentalism*, reprint 1994, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) p. 50.
59. Rubin, (1998) p. 30.
60. Buell, (1995) p. 291.
61. Rubin, (1998) pp. 38–44.
62. George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life,* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014) p. 8.
63. Monbiot, (2014) p. 9.
64. Monbiot, (2014) p. 10.
65. Monbiot, (2014) p. 10.
66. Marc Bekoff, *Rewilding Our Hearts Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*, (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014).

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67. Bekoff, (2014) p. 3.
68. Bekoff, (2014) p. 7.
69. Bekoff, (2014) p. 7.
70. Bekoff, (2014) p. 8.
71. See Buell, (1995) ch. 6.
72. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, vol. 1, no. 1, (January, 1996) pp. 7–28, 10.
73. Cronon, (1996) p. 14.
74. Cronon, (1996) pp. 16–17.
75. Wendell Berry, "Preserving Wildness," (1985), in *Home Economics*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1987) p. 139.
76. Berry, (1985) p. 139.
77. Berry, (1985) p. 140.

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Chapter Seven

Thoreau the Arcadian Exile

A second characteristic of the idyllic environmental imagination, is what Irving Babbitt calls the "pursuit of the dream woman." In a passage reflecting on this tendency in Rousseau, Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and others, he writes that "In his less misanthropic moods the Rousseauist sees in wild nature not only a refuge from society, but also a suitable setting for his companionship with the ideal mate."[1] Babbitt recognizes that such an idea did not start within the romantic era; it goes back to the works of Virgil and Shakespeare. The difference is that "The Arcadian of the past was much less inclined to sink down to the subrational and to merge his personality in the landscape."[2] The love of the nonhuman world becomes either a way of loving oneself or of loving a companion outside of, and preferable to, the human community. Yet, by imaginatively and legally "expanding" this community beyond humanity, one undermines the very relationships and traditions necessary for environmentally sound behavior.

Babbitt, unfortunately, does not develop a description of this problematic element as thoroughly as the other two, and he does not seem to take this "pursuit of the dream woman" beyond a kind of temporary desire for nature to be a *setting* for love. The temptation to seek community and companionship among nonhumans is deeper, however, and can manifest itself in radical and misanthropic ways. Unable to find the desired amount of acceptance in the community of human beings, the idyllic imagination turns to whatever is least contaminated by humanity. In this spirit, Thoreau writes:

> I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I

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> could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this.[3]

Thoreau's intercourse with nature allows him greater autonomy and provides a space for his escapism and withdrawal. As he writes elsewhere in his *Journal*, "By my intimacy with nature I find myself withdrawn from man. My interest in the sun and the moon, in the morning and the evening, compels me to solitude."[4] Such sentiments can add a more personal element to both the care and neglect of the nonhuman world, but it also introduces profound consequences when taken to an extreme. Thoreau's idealization of the nonhuman world is not accompanied by moderation or qualification, and he neglects the implications that such a personification could have for notions of rights, equality, morality, and ethics. Depending on one's moral and political assumptions, this neglect may be fortunate or problematic. Indeed, a number of debates emerging shortly after Thoreau's death consider the question of whether or not plants and animals could be granted the same moral and legal status as human persons. While mounting a full consideration of the increasingly complex defense of animal rights is beyond the scope of this book, it is striking how much of this submovement within environmental thought is based primarily, if not entirely, on imagination. This tendency emerges most frequently when individuals assert knowledge of nonhuman spirituality and consciousness for which there is no access, scientific or otherwise.

The previous comment requires qualification, however. In one sense, by analyzing hormonal and neurological changes in nonhuman life, scientists have documented a number of parallels between human emotions and sentience and that of animals especially. But this understanding reduces sentience to merely biological processes and neurological responses to sense-perception. While one may feel something, describing that feeling and interpreting it is not a function of the senses. Sense data is not received in a vacuum, but is acquired historically. One does not simply "smell a smell," for example, but a particular smell at a particular time and place. Animals may show biological evidence of experiencing a feeling, but how they interpret the particularity of that feeling is inaccessible. They may react with joy, fear or pain but how "deep" does that feeling go? Scientists can observe and interpret the behavior of nonhumans, but the subjectivity of animal emotion and thought is not, without the resources of a common comprehensive language, something which can be proven or disproven.

Consciousness is even more problematic when considering nonhumans. In a basic sense, consciousness is simply the state of being "aware" of one's surroundings—a state which animals and plants can achieve in a sense. To be genuinely and fully conscious, however, is far more complicated. To what

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extent does an animal know where it is temporally? Is an animal conscious of consciousness? Even if a level of "time-consciousness" and "object-consciousness" can be identified, the extent of that consciousness remains opaque. To the degree that consciousness is more than just awareness of "thatness," it would be difficult to ascertain how deep animal consciousness goes, or if it could ever apprehend more spiritual or "transcendent" aspects of reality the way many human beings claim to do.

Furthermore, relationships with other human beings, in contrast with nonhuman companions, require considerable work, patience, and sacrifice, but such community is part of what makes us human. Claes Ryn describes community as "the moral goal for society," and explains that "Community is human association under the guidance of ethical conscience. Man's true humanity is realized by being shared."[5] Only other humans know what it means to be human, and human relationships require considerable sacrifice if anything resembling a common good is to be achieved. The companionship one has with a tree or an animal costs very little comparatively, though there is certainly a cost. Indeed, ecologically speaking, humans have a unique responsibility for a common good that extends to the well-being of nonhumans and which requires restraint and sacrifice on the part of human beings. The nonhuman, world, however does not possess a similar responsibility beyond its own survival. The admittedly controversial, but profoundly Thoreauvian, assumption that human beings seek not merely to live, but to live "deliberately" and meaningfully, draws an important distinction between the human and nonhuman.

COMPANIONSHIP AND THE NONHUMAN

Thoreau evinces considerable evidence of the idyllic imagination in his pursuit of an ideal companion in nature. Despite his extensive writing on friendship, his "friends" existed more as ideas than as concrete persons. The disappointment with others' failure to live up to his ideal drove him to nonhuman nature in search of a companion. In a letter to Lucy Jackson Brown, Thoreau remarks, "I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this nature I praise. Why won't you believe that mine is more human than any single man or woman can be? that in it—in the sunset there, are all the qualities that can adorn a household—and that sometimes in a fluttering leaf, one may hear all your Christianity preached."[6] And in another passage, while listening to the foxes near he and his brother John's camp, he asks, "Why should we not cultivate neighborly relations with the foxes? . . . Is man powder and the fox flint and steal? Has not the time come when men and

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foxes shall lie down together?"[7] In this play on Isaiah 11, Thoreau entertains the possibility that a kind of progress is realized when man's antagonism with and segregation from nonhumans are overcome.

Unlike the other manifestations of the idyllic environmental imagination identified by Babbitt, the moral imagination does not offer here an alternative side to the same coin. The moral imagination resists idealizing companionship with nature as equivalent to friendship between humans. Thankfully, Thoreau did not personify nature as often as later nature writers like John Muir in *Stickeen* or Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*.[8] Companionship is an inescapably human need which only other humans can fill.

While pets have long been a part of civilized and uncivilized society, they cannot offer the depth of moral and spiritual intercourse of human-to-human relationships.[9] Regardless of how one values, respects, or even loves nonhumans, a plant or an animal cannot hold a human accountable, administer justice or, as in some religions, administer sacraments or offer forgiveness. Animals demonstrate an extraordinary amount of what humans can only identify as emotions and even a kind of "reason," but they lack the unique moral and spiritual depth and freedom that are necessary in human communities.[10]

From children's stories like C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* to Disney's *The Lion King*, popular culture has found considerable utility in imagining community and companionship among nonhuman nature and between humans and nonhumans. What the moral imagination finds disturbing, however, is when this personification and idealization of nature as a companion is viewed as preferable to human society, or when it becomes the basis for ascribing to nature a value equal to or above human beings. One might ask, for example, given this imaginative orientation, what is to prevent humans from being treated like animals instead of animals being treated like humans?

Like Babbitt, Lawrence Buell observes this pursuit of companionship in nature as part of the environmental imagination, but Buell does not view the tendency as a fundamental problem. The desire for companionship with nonhumans is preceded by the personification of nature. This practice is common in a number of works of fiction and nonfiction which, as Buell discusses, emerges throughout children's stories and modern films. The motivation for such imagination can vary, but ". . . one motive for the personification of nature" may be "to offset what might otherwise seem the bleakness of renouncing anthropocentrism."[11] Once man has achieved a more "ecocentric" imagination, as Buell describes, he will sense a significant loss of companionship which the natural nonhuman world may be able to remedy. Another possible motivation is the sense in which humans feel a need to personify nature in order to attribute to it the dignity and rights that plants and animals seemingly deserve. This was particularly evident in one of the earliest calls for animal rights by Henry S. Salt, who also happened to be one of Thoreau's

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first biographers.[12] Salt's *Animal Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress*[13] argued that man's fullest ethical development would necessarily include the expansion of natural rights to nonhuman nature. Distinctions in value between humans and nonhumans were incoherent to Salt and ultimately degraded humanity's own ethical standing. To recognize animals' rights was itself, paradoxically, fidelity to our own humanity.[14]

Salt claims that "the idea of Humanity is no longer confined to man; it is beginning to extend itself to the lower animals."[15] Expanding this "humanness" is a task to be taken up in a number of ways, but especially in education and by a literary, intellectual, and social "crusade."[16] Salt also seems to recognize that this education is an education of imagination, and an interdisciplinary effort to shape society's very intuition of what is right, wrong, good, true, and beautiful.

John Muir, a contemporary of Salt and one of the earliest environmental readers of Thoreau, was also moved to personify nonhumans. Muir was a Scottish-born author, naturalist and advocate of the creation of National Parks. He was a preservationist, a pioneering scientist and popularized many of the ideas that are synonymous with environmental activism and philosophy. He founded the Sierra Club and influenced the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and many twentieth-century American environmentalists.

Muir's most commercially popular work was *Stickeen* (1909),[17] named after "an unprepossessing, standoffish, intelligent little mongrel dog . . . which followed Muir on an Alaskan glacier excursion that got progressively more grim and dangerous."[18] The story plays up the relationship between Muir and the dog as a parallel to the seemingly infinite possibilities which experience with the nonhuman world can reveal about animals and their personhood. Faced with considerable challenges, Stickeen demonstrates courage, curiosity, and joy. The book's central moment occurs when Muir, after crossing a deep crevice in a glacier by means of a very narrow bridge of ice, is waiting for Stickeen to follow him. To Muir, Stickeen demonstrates "wonderful sagacity"[19] by recognizing the danger of crossing the narrow path. He tries to "reason" with the dog, offering a kind of sermon on risk and death. Muir writes that Stickeen's "voice and gestures, hopes and fears, were so perfectly human that none could mistake them; while he seemed to understand every word of mine."[20] When the dog finally crosses, he writes that "Never before or since have I seen anything like so passionate a revulsion from the depths of despair to exultant, triumphant, uncontrollable joy."[21] Such description itself does not necessarily evince an idyllic imagination. Few would deny that animals, and especially dogs, can experience and express something akin to human emotion. They can be affectionate, afraid, angry, disinterested, and so forth, with all the corresponding possibilities for expression. But the depth of these emotions and their precise nature remains

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a mystery. Muir is forced to describe the dog's behavior in a language which Stickeen cannot reproduce or validate. While Muir seems sympathetic to a more realistic perspective at the beginning of the story, by its conclusion the dog has persuaded Muir that Stickeen possesses much more personality than one could establish in a definitive sense.

Muir's personification of Stickeen is more sentiment than argument. While his story exemplifies the kind of emotional depth that an animal can possess, the dog could never achieve the kind of humanity Salt calls for and which Muir "discovers." The moral imagination resists this tendency on a number of grounds, the most important of which is that imposing humanness on animals fails to recognize the inability of animals to achieve the same kind of moral and spiritual *improvement* that humans are called to. Animals can physically grow, adapt, and learn, but their capacity to acquire new virtues or moral wisdom, as Muir portrays in *Stickeen*, is something on which humans can only speculate. Without a common, comprehensive language there is no way for humans to establish the moral and spiritual nature of animals.[22] Furthermore, as C. S. Lewis argued, those who are sympathetic to extending the "idea of Humanity" to nonhumans tend to confuse sentience and conscience.[23] The fact that Stickeen evinces fear, wisdom, and courage on the glacier is an example of sentience, but there is no evidence such a dog can stand "above" these experiences and identify them as experiences.

IMAGINATION AND HUMAN-NONHUMAN EQUALITY

Muir's writings about his companionship with Stickeen (a dog whose existence is never mentioned in the journals from his actual trip to Alaska) only scratch the surface of his imaginative personification of nature. Indeed, Stickeen may have been the *least* personified of the nonhumans mentioned by Muir.[24] Strictly speaking, Muir did not conceive of humans' value as less than that of nonhumans, but he also did not place man above plants, animals, mountains, and rocks. The basis for this belief was grounded in the natural interconnectedness of all life and the reality of a common divine Creator. It was a deeply historical relationship which man shared with the environment; a profound interdependence and equality rendering even the smallest creatures inviolable.[25]

While Muir personified plants, dogs, bears, and other animals, he did not go so far as to entertain a comprehensive legal and political expression for the equality he otherwise described between humans and nonhumans.[26] While he did advocate for the preservation of undeveloped land and for conservation, and even for the "rights of creation," the notion of "animal rights" or legal "standing" for trees does not seem to have crossed his mind. However, his idyllic imagination sowed the seeds of, and provided a vocabu-

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lary for, later animal rights activists. If works like *Stickeen*, Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, or even *Moby Dick* could inspire one to think of morality and dignity in the natural nonhuman world, why not entertain the expansion of rights and responsibility to nonhumans?

Historian Roderick Nash has considered the possibility of the rights of nature as an inevitable moral advance of liberal principles. Appealing to the modern idea of a social contract and its corresponding attention to natural rights, Nash saw an opportunity in American liberal democracy where other environmentalists saw mainly antagonism. In *The Rights of Nature,*[27] liberalism does not present an obstacle to environmental well-being, but instead provides the very ideology needed for the cultivation of a comprehensive environmental ethic.[28] Nash discourages environmentalism from assuming an excessively countercultural or subversive position against American liberal democracy because within liberalism one will find the "language of rights"—a tool which Nash believes many environmentalists overlook.[29]

For Nash, liberalism can be environmentally friendly as long as it extends the concept of natural rights to include the nonhuman world.[30] If a liberal regime expands the social contract to include plants and animals in the same way it once expanded to include women, slaves, and Native Americans, then liberalism and the "rights of nature" will provide the requisite justification for more environmentally beneficial policy and behavior.[31] Animals and plants possess "inalienable rights," just like humans, and are granted equal protection of their liberty.[32] This does not make Nash's environmentalism any less radical,[33] but it does reorient the relationship between liberalism and environmentalism as one of cooperation instead of conflict. An expanded social contract may not eliminate the elements of capitalism, materialism, and individualism that are at odds with the environment, but liberalism *does* seem to provide a limited *moral* framework and language useful for justifying many environmental policies.

In order to persuade others of this liberal environmentalism, Nash outlines a progressive history of ethics in which "ethical maturity" is defined by expanding notions of intrinsic value from the self, to other humans, to nonhuman living things, and finally to everything. History is the story of increasing tolerance and expanding ethics to an ever-widening circle of human beings, breaking down barriers of race, gender, sexuality, and national origin. That expansion can now continue to the liberation of the nonhuman world. "There have been calls," Nash observes, "for 'the liberation of nature,' 'the liberation of life,' 'the rights of the planet,' and even defense of the right of the solar system and universe to be free from human disturbance."[34]

Nash's articulation of the expanding rights of nature requires, not simply the discouragement of anthropocentrism, but the elimination of humans. Even if this elimination is resisted, however, Nash's notion of rights emerges as a claim against human interference in the natural world—a position that is

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entirely impossible if man is to have the most basic needs of food, water, and shelter. Furthermore, the rights of nonhumans, as Nash describes, preclude the very environmentalism and policy he hopes to support. Conservation and preservation require interference in the nonhuman world. Ascribing rights to nature is ultimately little more than sentimental environmentalism and an excuse to neglect the environment and to harbor a dangerous misanthropy. Nash's argument rests less on the practical realities of the "rights of nature" and more on self-evident assertions and an appeal to a kind of liberal nobility and egalitarianism rooted in a human impulse toward the liberation of anyone and anything labeled as oppressed.[35]

Simply inspiring a sentiment of pity and outrage about a neglect of nature's rights is itself an argument, for Nash. Reason is abandoned and the idyllic imagination reigns. For Nash, it is so self-evident that nonhumans are oppressed that a more sophisticated and systematic argument for their liberation and rights is unnecessary. The very existence of something and a corresponding sympathy toward it, justifies a claim to rights and freedom. In the twentieth century, this ideology became powerful enough to motivate violent and nonviolent acts of resistance to perceived injustices toward nonhumans. From the Endangered Species Act to the sabotaging of logging operations and the sinking of whaling ships, the rights of nature have been defended and fought for almost entirely on the basis of sentiments and the idyllic imagination.

The idea of nature's rights is idyllic, in part, because Nash and similarly oriented thinkers fail to understand the reality of rights. As David Walsh rightly observes, "It was the Christian idea of the soul whose origin and destiny is transcendent that first made it possible for the individual to stand over against society and the world, as a reality that can never simply be contained by them. This was the source of individual rights. To this, Christianity added the related idea of the equality of all souls before God."[36] The presence of a soul and transcendence within animals and plants cannot be established by man because there is no language within the nonhuman world by which the existence of such transcendence can be identified and articulated. Any attempt by humans to establish this notion requires what Babbitt called the "pathetic fallacy." Individuals may ascribe to nature emotions and experiences, but those can only be that human's own emotions and experiences. No amount of empathy and sentiment can eliminate our subjectivity. Man's destiny is transcendent and allows us to stand over and against society and the world, as Walsh observed, but human beings do not transcend their own being. A person can be conscious of her experiences *as* experiences, but she cannot abandon her unique physical and temporal location in existence. The mere existence of something, or one's feelings toward it, cannot justify its claim to a right or freedom beyond merely asserting it. In the process the

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animal or plant in possession of the right becomes an abstraction removed from its observable, historical existence. Like Thoreau's "friends," the idea of nature becomes more "real" than nature itself.

NONHUMANS AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION

Treating the nonhuman world abstractly and as a source of companionship allows those with an idyllic imagination to escape the difficult task of genuine community and friendship. Since animals and plants cannot speak for themselves, man becomes, along with the Lorax[37] of Dr. Seuss's invention, a "speaker for the trees." One then invents the moral and ethical obligations and demands that nonhumans seemingly place on humans, and claim privileged access to the interests of mammals, insects, flowers, and weeds. In practice, these inventions are ultimately claims made by one group of humans over another. The nonhuman world is incidental. Then, in the conflict between rights claims for humans and those for nonhumans, there is little, if any, ground for a resolution beyond a self-asserted sentimental morality. Human dignity likely requires the abandonment of the conceived egalitarianism between humans and nonhumans. Can claims of man and the claims of nonhumans consistently achieve a political, ethical, and economic compatibility? For some, such as the champions of population control, a preference for nonhumans seems obvious. Since humans can and will and achieve their own destruction, they have a responsibility to practice such control for the sake of other species and their own. But on what grounds is this sacrifice called for? In a world where the mere existence of something gives it a claim to rights, there is no ground to which one can appeal when these rights are in competition. The "mature ethics" that Nash describes as history moving toward risks disintegrating into lawlessness and rule by the strongest.

Thoreau does not take the personification of nature to the extremes of John Muir or animal rights activists. While he does advocate for vegetarianism in the "Higher Laws" chapter of *Walden* and even hints at animals possessing a level of dignity, he did not conceive of the legal and political implications of this perspective. Thoreau's imagination of idyllic and abstract friendship, and his failure to ground even his opposition to slavery in the distinctive and transcendent element of human existence, left open the possibility of Henry Salt and much later, Peter Singer's, claims for animal rights and liberation.

Unlike the problem of the Arcadian longing, this "pursuit of the ideal companion" and the corresponding radical personification of nature does not suggest an alternative moral imagination. While common human experience with pets and other animals demonstrates that meaningful interaction, affection and limited levels of cooperation and problem-solving can occur be-

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tween humans and nonhumans, these are insufficient conditions for the full realization of *community* beyond humans. There is no comprehensive shared language between humans, plants, and animals, no common destiny or sense of meaning. nonhumans, as far as is known, lack an historical sense, culture or an aesthetic. These distinctions neither justify cruelty to animals nor eliminate the possibility of their intrinsic value. But this reality of human and nonhuman differences significantly undermines claims to the companionship and society of humans with plants and animals.

Wendell Berry again provides something of a corrective to this problematic tendency of the idyllic imagination. The pursuit of companionship in nature and the fight for nature's rights often comes at the expense of the communities whose relationship to the land is central for environmental well-being. For Berry, it is the breakdown of true community among humans that facilitates ecological crises. Achieving a greater harmony with nature is not a product of personifying land and animals or by ascribing rights to crops and livestock. Harmony is achieved by historical experience, knowledge of the land transmitted by tradition, by scientific investigation, and by cultivating the moral imagination.[38] While Berry may occasionally tend toward an idealization of small local communities, there is considerable precedent for the manner in which local communities are well equipped to identify and solve environmental problems.

The tragedy of Love Canal is one example where a local community, recovering an intimate knowledge of their land and environment discovered a disturbing correlation between the presence of chemical waste and the increase in miscarriages and birth defects of local children.[39] Similar benefits of local knowledge and community are realized daily as generations of farmers pass down knowledge of their land with insights on crop rotation, water runoff, erosion, and the dynamics of the local soil. The recent growth in "localism" attempts to reduce the distance between producers and consumers so that both the costs and benefits of production are realized in the same community. The late Elinor Ostrom, an influential political scientist, has also provided a compelling picture of how, in contrast to conventional models of managing natural resources (i.e., Garret Hardin's "tragedy of the commons," the "prisoner's dilemma," and Mancur Olson's "logic of collective action"), more localized institutions emerging from the communities themselves, instead of being imposed on them, are more effective at solving the kind of "commons problems" characteristic of environmental politics.[40]

While a local, decentralized agrarian economy cannot solve all environmental problems, stronger human communities can make a profound impact on ecological well-being. When the victims of poor product development, the abuse of livestock and wildlife, toxic waste, polluted air and water, and contaminated food have human names and faces in one's own community, a profound sense of responsibility may grow out of those relationships. While

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community is no guarantee of environmental responsibility, a community's memory, tradition, and ability to hold other members accountable offers much more powerful tools to the environmentalist than a fleeting personification and an invocation of nature's imagined "rights."

NOTES

1. Babbitt, (2009) p. 280.
2. Babbitt, (2009) p. 281.
3. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. IV, ch. 9, January 3, 1853, p. 445.
4. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. IV, ch. 3, July 26, 1852, p. 258.
5. Claes G. Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life: A Philosophy of Politics and Community*, 2nd ed., (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1990) p. 83.
6. Henry David Thoreau, "Letter to Lucy Jackson Brown," *The Correspondence of Henry D. Thoreau, Volume I: 1834–1848*, ed. by Robert N. Hudspeth, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2013) p. 77.
7. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. I, ch. 3, August 31, 1839, p. 89.
8. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, (New York: Oxford University, 1949).
9. A number of authors dispute this, including the Humane Society President/CEO, Wayne Pacelle in his book entitled *The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, Our Call to Defend Them*, (New York: William Marrow/HarperCollins, 2011); and Marc Bekoff, *Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*, (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014).
10. It is important to note that, the point here is not to argue that animals and plants lack moral standing, reason, sentience, etc. But they do not possess such things in a way that could replace genuine human community.
11. Buell, (1995) pp. 180–81.
12. Henry S. Salt, *Life of Henry David Thoreau*, originally published 1890, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1993).
13. Henry S. Salt, *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, originally published in 1892, (Clarks Summit, PA: Society for Animal Rights Inc., 1980).
14. Salt, (1980) pp. 121–22.
15. Salt, (1980) p. 112.
16. Salt, (1980) p. 122.
17. John Muir, *Stickeen*, Originally published by Houghton-Mifflin, 1909, (Dunwoody, GA: Norman S. Berg, 1971).
18. Buell, (1995) p. 195.
19. Muir, (1971) p. 57
20. Muir, (1971) p. 61.
21. Muir, (1971) pp. 65–66.
22. C. S. Lewis, however, was struck by how tempting it might be for humans to desire a deeper society with animals and nature in general. We rightly find beauty in the nonhuman world with which we long to be united, and so we personify it in order to achieve that unity. He writes, "We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace, and power of which Nature is the image." "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, reprint 1949, (New York: HarperOne, 1980) pp. 42–43.
23. See C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, originally Published 1940, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996) ch. 9, "Animal Pain."
24. See John Tallmadge, "John Muir and the Poetics of Natural Conversion," *North Dakota Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 2, (Spring 1991) p. 73; and Buell, (1995) p. 193.

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25. Muir writes, "Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit—the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge." John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, reprint 1916, in *The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books*, (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992) pp. 160–61.

26. Perhaps the most well-known and influential attempts at outlining such legal rights and ideas is found in Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing? Law, Morality, and the Environment*, 3rd ed., 1st edition published in 1972, (New York: Oxford University, 2010).

27. Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

28. The argument that liberalism and environmentalism are inherently incompatible is ubiquitous throughout the literature on environmental politics, though a rather striking example is found in David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith's book, *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007). For Shearman and Smith, authoritarianism could just as easily accommodate principles conducive to environmental well-being and what we think is a liberal society. Indeed, Shearman and Smith have argued for a radical acceptance of a totalitarian regime in response to "catastrophic climate change." They conclude that "authoritarianism is the natural state of humanity," (p. xvi) and that liberalism is simply beyond repair. Rampant self-interest has created something akin to Thomas Hobbes's state of nature, and now, for the sake of our survival, we must consent to be ruled by a group of elite scientists committed to ecology over economy and to the "common good" over individualism. Shearman and Smith give preference to survival over liberty, and explain how as Darwinian evolutionists they foresee the possibility of scientifically overcoming shortcomings in human nature to protect against destructive rulers.

29. Nash, (1989) pp. 10–11.

30. Nash, (1989) p. 10.

31. Nash, (1989) pp. 10–12.

32. It is unclear whether or not the notion of animals having "liberty" makes any sense. If the ability to choose between two or more alternatives or things is the basis of such liberty, then perhaps animal liberty is possible. Yet, again, humans do not have access to the consciousness of animals. They appear to base much of their "choices" on survival of themselves or their species. But can they choose against this concern? How does one account for instinct and liberty? Ultimately, without a common language, such reflections can only be speculative at best.

33. Nash, (1989) pp. 11–12.

34. Nash, (1989) pp. 5–6.

35. Nash, (1989) pp. 161–2.

36. David Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1997) p. 28.

37. Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*, (New York: Random House, 1971).

38. See Wendell Berry, "The Conservation of Nature and the Preservation of Humanity," in *Another Turn of the Crank*, (New York: Counterpoint, 1995).

39. The community of Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York discovered in 1978 that their homes and schools were constructed on top of a large deposit of poisonous chemicals buried by the Hooker Chemical Company. The chemicals were found to have contaminated the local soil and ground water, causing an unusual number of severe health problems in the children of Love Canal especially. Led by Lois Gibbs and the local Home Owners Association, the community mounted a grassroots effort to acquire government relief, evacuations, clean-up, healthcare, and prosecution of the Hooker Chemical Company. See Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement*, revised ed., (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2003) pp. 227–29.

40. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, (New York: Cambridge University, 1990).

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Chapter Eight

Infinite Arcadia

Babbitt's third and most important observation of the idyllic imagination of nature is what he calls the "aspiration toward the infinite." By which he means the view that the natural, nonhuman world provides for the spiritual needs of humanity.[1] Modern environmentalism is often likened to a religion—an association which may be decried, celebrated, or ignored. Whether one views the association of environmentalists with religion as a positive or a negative, most sides of the debate overlook the extent to which human beings are inescapably spiritual in a world that is interminably mysterious. The religious character of modern environmentalism then, is inevitable because spirituality and mystery is part of being human. What is not inevitable is that this character produces consistently good or bad "fruit." The nature of such "fruit," what one's particular beliefs are and how they translate into concrete action corresponds to the quality of an individual or group's imagination.

The idyllic environmental imagination debases religion by divinizing nonhuman nature and by subordinating moral effort to religious sentiment. "The romantic idea of the infinite," Babbitt observes, "is an aid to the spirit in throwing off its limitations and so in feeling itself 'free.'"[2] Spirituality rooted in an affection for nonhuman nature fuels the idyllic imagination's abolition of morality and the cultivation of a spirituality which requires sentiment, but little or no moral effort. It is spirituality with no sacrifice or struggle, and it pursues no end other than self-gratification. The idyllic environmental imagination, as Babbitt observed, takes experiences that ought to remain aesthetic and transforms them into religious experiences.[3]

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THOREAU AND RELIGION

Thoreau's religious influences and affinities are the subject of some controversy among scholars, but it is not topic which he ignores. Religion is a frequent subject in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, where he exhibits a tendency toward a spirituality characteristic of idyllic imagination:

> Surely the fates are forever kind, though Nature's laws are more immutable than any despot's, yet to man's daily life they rarely seem rigid, but permit him to relax with license in summer weather. He is not harshly reminded of the things he may not do. She is very kind and liberal to all men of vicious habits, and certainly does not deny them quarter; they do not die without priest.[4]

What enforced "laws" does Nature have at all, from Thoreau's perspective? On what basis could the worshipper of this nature identify "vicious habits?" Thoreau asserts that nature accepts persons as they are, but it also never requires those persons to improve and grow. By ascribing to nature a level of divinity, he also gives a considerable legitimacy and authority to this virtual evacuation of moral responsibility. Nature may provide priests, but there will be nothing to confess to them.

Thoreau's spirituality and religious sympathies have been the subject of several studies and scholarly discussions. Emerson said of Thoreau, "Whilst he used in his writings a certain petulance of remark in reference to churches or churchmen, he was a person of a rare, tender and absolute religion."[5] Though Thoreau was never explicit about any religious commitments, he was rather blunt in his distaste for Christianity. "[T]he New Testament," he writes, "treats of man and man's so-called spiritual affairs too exclusively, and is too constantly moral and personal, to alone content me, who am not interested solely in man's religious or moral nature, in man even."[6] The Bible is incomplete and inadequate for Thoreau. It does not admit enough moral autonomy, is rarely followed by those who read it, and is seemingly too otherworldly. It is striking, but not unexpected, then, when he writes, "Christ was a sublime actor on the stage of the world. . . . Yet he taught mankind but imperfectly how to live; his thoughts were all directed toward another world. There is another kind of success than his. Even here we have a sort of living to get, and must buffet it somewhat longer."[7]

Many of Thoreau's own prescriptions eschew practicality and the realities of this world, but his concern with the alleged shortcomings of Jesus hints at why he would emphasize nature over traditional religion as a source of spirituality. A spiritual encounter with the natural nonhuman world added layers and concreteness to the way he imagined nature and avoided the

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excessive otherworldly tendencies of Christianity. Nature provoked in Thoreau a sense of a divine and embodied universal. His religion was less a faith and more an experience with something indefinite and mysterious:

> I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves; the one historic truth, the most remarkable face which can become the distinct and uninvited subject of our thought, the actual glory of the universe; the only fact which a human being cannot avoid recognizing or in some way forget or dispense with.[8]

The precise identity of that "Something" is never made explicit, but this indefiniteness may be intentional. According to Christopher Dustin, Thoreau's religion is an encounter with that which is fundamentally indistinct, mysterious and infinite.[9] This vague "Something" is the source of Thoreau's moral freedom and constantly reminds him of the limits of knowledge. The divine or the infinite is always out of reach, but is nevertheless sought in the encounter with nature.

Thoreau never defined Nature in any static or scientific sense; he sought to understand the nonhuman world on its own terms. The *mystery* of Nature was the most distinctive characteristic of his intuition of the nonhuman world, and his nondogmatic spirituality resisted a definitive, closed doctrine of "nature as divine." Thoreau remained open to further revelation and enlargement, and he does not give the natural world the status of *the* deity. He speaks of an "everlasting Something" in nature, but that "Something," is never fully incarnate. It is an unnamed presence, but it is never a person or a particular something which participates in and reveals a universal Something.

This mysterious disposition of both nature and the divine is the reason imagination is of such great importance for the development and endurance of religion. Rituals, saints, parables, scriptures, art and idols, architecture, music, and ceremonies have provided a means by which to facilitate humans' relationship with the divine and the supernatural. Beliefs are reinforced and brought to life by explicit and implicit "liturgies." James K. A. Smith defines liturgies, in a general sense, as "*rituals of ultimate concern*."[10] A liturgy is more than an assigned set of scriptural or responsorial readings, habits, and routines. A liturgy is a narrower *set* of practices and rituals "that are formative for identity, that inculcate particular visions of the good life, and do so in a way that means to trump other ritual formations."[11] Liturgies shape, and are shaped by, that which individuals most desire. One might also consider such liturgies to have parallels in the rituals of primitive societies and tribes. Dolores LaChappelle, for example, recognized this writing that "Western European industrial culture" desperately needed to recover the primitive emphasis on ritual if the ecological crisis is to be averted:

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> Ritual is essential because it is truly the pattern that connects. It provides communication at all levels—communication among all systems within the individual human organism. . . . Ritual provides us with a tool for learning to think logically, analogically and ecologically as we move toward a sustainable culture. Most important of all, perhaps, during rituals we move toward the experience . . . of *finding* ourselves within nature, and that is the key to sustainable culture.[12]

The moral imagination's resistance to the idyllic imagination's divinization of nature, then, is not an attempt to abandon religion. Instead, it seeks to reorient the liturgy so as to order the will and imagination away from emotionalism and the idealization of the nonhuman world toward a more genuine religion that affirms moral effort and moderation. Babbitt's opposition to the idyllic imagination's "aspiration toward the infinite" is an objection to a disordered liturgy animated by escapism and the pursuit of divinity in that which is not divine.

The moral imagination prefers an alternative liturgy that requires sacrifice, devotion, moral effort, an acknowledgment of mystery and the synthesis of the universal and the particular. It draws on tradition and experience to facilitate humanity's relationship with the divine while maintaining humility, an awareness of mystery and faithfulness to reality. This faith looks to the supernatural without neglecting the natural. Perhaps the best word to capture what the moral imagination offers in this regard is "sacramentality," which is defined by the recognition of something in concrete historical experience that is mysterious and sacred by virtue of its participation in the universals of goodness, truth, and beauty. The imagery of a sacrament conveys a depth of experience that mere sentiment is unable to capture. Faithful administration of, and participation in, a sacrament requires obedience, openness, historical sensitivity, humility, and a desire to be more fully human by being attuned to the source of humanity and order.

Thoreau lived in a tension between the moral and idyllic imagination, and he anticipated many of the same spiritual questions and struggles that environmentalism would face in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Environmentalism has long resisted the charge that it is more a religion than a political or ethico-cultural movement,[13] but it has often relied on a kind of liturgy that is characteristic of more traditional religions. Thoreau can be said to have inspired elements of this liturgy, and he cultivated the ideas and inspiration for its development by his twentieth-century heirs. He provided later environmentalists with a liturgical language and scripture in *Walden*, "Walking" and other texts. Buell observes that "*Walden* seems to define itself as aspiring literary classic in the form of self-reflexive personal testament."[14] Like the Gospels of Christianity, Thoreau's account of nature reads like a deeply personal, eyewitness account of the divine's activity. He then responds in a manner similar to religious orders and faithful adherents, seek-

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ing the divine in his careful observations and reflections on nature in his almost daily excursions and hikes, his retreat to Walden Pond and his passion for preaching abolition. He even argues for a more vegetarian diet, eschewing the consumption of meat *not* on strict nutritional grounds, but because it served his need to "preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition."[15] While Thoreau is not to modern environmentalism what Jesus is to Christianity or Muhammad to Islam, he remains a spiritual inspiration for modern "green" religions and for adherents of traditional religions looking for exemplars. It is no surprise, then, that the great preservationist John Muir made his own "pilgrimage" to Walden Pond[16] when he visited Concord in 1893.

Thoreau can be said to have laid the foundations of a more religious environmentalism. While he reluctantly referred to himself as a pantheist, he did not set out to found a new religion or order. Saints and rituals, doctrines, and creeds did not appeal to Thoreau, but these religious elements would nevertheless emerge to give structure to a growing environmental liturgy. Much of this development would come in works of fiction, film, and art, inevitably exposing the liturgy to the tension between the moral and idyllic imagination. Following Thoreau's example and inspiration, later environmentalists have found themselves in the same tension. To that end, several recent works have begun to shed light on the religious character of environmentalism and its historical roots in traditional religions.[17] Scholars have shown that elements of environmentalism's religious character preceded Thoreau, as did the moral-idyllic tension, but he remains a critical turning point in environmentalism's spiritual development.

Thomas R. Dunlap, for example, observes how much of modern environmentalism's history was more than a response to scientific revelation and romantic musings. Environmentalism has long evinced considerable parallels with many religious traditions by asserting moral imperatives and addressing "ultimate questions" of identity, purpose, and destiny. For some, this religious character provides grounds for rejecting environmentalism. Dunlap argues alternatively that environmentalism should embrace its religious roots and personality, and that a failure to do so may close the movement off to a full self-understanding and valuable rhetorical resources. As Dunlap explains, environmentalists ought to recognize that their task is more than the development and application of scientific information, political reform, or simply the resistance to environmental degradation. "It asks not just that we change our policies or even our habits, but that we change our hearts," Dunlap writes, "it invokes the sacred, holding some areas and species in awe and finding in wilderness the opening to ultimate reality.[18]

To affect such a change, however, requires considerable moral and spiritual effort. Traditional religions have structured this effort in the forms of liturgy and spiritual discipline, but Dunlap describes an environmental relig-

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ion as a spirituality that eschews liturgy and institutions. "Out in the woods" Dunlap writes, "names and creeds vanished, leaving me with sensations and experiences that did not easily map back into formal knowledge."[19] In one sense, this less structured and unrestrained spirituality is exactly what Babbitt feared. In another sense, Dunlap illustrates, the encounter with mysterious nature is precisely what resists scientists' tendency to reduce the world to mere materiality and system:

> The culture divided "science" from "religion," "knowledge" from "faith," and "reason" from "emotion." Science held that humans could understand the universe, while religions believed some things were beyond humans—"mysteries." Science saw "wonder," some mixture of astonishment and admiration, as our proper reaction to the beauties of the world, while creeds asked for "awe," reverence and a touch of dread in the face of what was beyond human beings. But the neat divisions broke down. Science, as a matter of policy, denied mystery. Officially, it held, as definitely as a fundamentalist preacher cleaving to the Word of God, that human reason revealed all and that everything was only matter. In practice, scientists, particularly field biologists and physicists, smuggled mystery in the back door, for they had a sense of wonder about their subjects that shaded into awe. Science officially excluded talk of ultimates, but scientists used science to that end.[20]

Religion and science, in other words, need not be antagonistic. If environmental religion has appreciated the immaterial reality of nature, it has also undervalued the order that science and a more liturgical tradition might provide. Dunlap overlooks this important aspect, and casts religion more as a rhetorical, moral and emotional phenomenon than as a comprehensive articulation of reality—of what is good, true, and beautiful. To be fair, as a historian he does recognize the need for exemplars to bring this environmental spirituality and faith to life. Thoreau provides these spiritual examples to environmentalism the way the lives of saints inspire Christianity. He is admired by Dunlap for disparaging neither nature nor civilization, and for offering a middle ground before the extremes of deep ecology and a strict materialistic environmentalism existed.

While Thoreau provides a kind of liturgical order to help navigate an environmental religion, Dunlap and other environmentalists' resistance to more institutionalized and structured religiosity—an aversion which also has a source in Thoreau—risks succumbing to the idyllic imagination. An idyllic environmental imagination emerges throughout environmental thought's engagement with its religious character, and especially in so-called deep ecology, the notion of "deep green religion" and in environmental apocalypticism. The moral environmental imagination, however, does not respond to this

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tendency by abandoning religion. Instead, it strives toward a liturgy and order that pulls religion away from an unrestrained emotionalism, sham spirituality, and a fatalistic or apathetic apocalypticism.

DEEP ECOLOGY AND THE IDYLLIC IMAGINATION

Deep ecology is among the most controversial manifestations of environmental thought, and one of the clearest examples of the idyllic environmental imagination. Deep ecology draws attention to what it identifies as the more *fundamental* problems behind humanity's improper attitude toward, or misuse of, the nonhuman world. While its primary adherents do not use the word "imagination," they often speak of their efforts as a reshaping of intuitions and perceptions. Deep ecologists do not want to simply focus on fighting pollution, for example, they desire to confront the philosophical, psychological, cultural, economic, and spiritual context and disposition underlying pollution. This concern with more fundamental problems informs its self-designation as "deep," as opposed to the supposedly "shallow" environmentalisms whose "central objective [is] to fight against pollution and resource depletion in order to improve the health and affluence of people in developed nations."[21] Shallow environmentalism or ecology is more self-serving and anthropocentric, while deep ecology professes a more altruistic "biocentrism."

The central tenets and practices of deep ecology, as well as the nature of "shallow" ecology, are disputed, but the movement generally revolves around the work of the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess (1912–2009). "In [1972, Naess] wrote an essay entitled 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement,'" setting into motion what "would also become the most controversial branch of environmentalism."[22] Naess coined the term "deep ecology," and he spent the last four decades of his life developing and defending the characteristics and principles of the movement. Along with Gary Snyder, George Sessions, Bill Devall, and others, Naess and his followers have worked to identify the fundamental problems of Western culture and thought which place humans at odds with the well-being of the nonhuman world. In general, "most deep ecology movement theorists now identify the movement with [what they call] the deep questioning process, the eight-point platform, and the need for humans to identify with nonhumans and the wild world."[23] The first point of relative agreement centers on an "eight-point platform" outlined by Naess and George Sessions in the 1980s:[24]

1. Both human and nonhuman life forms have intrinsic and inherent value independent of their usefulness to humans.
2. Richness and diversity of life have value in themselves.

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3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except for vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human and nonhuman life requires a substantial decrease in human population.
5. Human interference in the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Future economic, technological, and ideological policies must be deeply different from those of the present.
7. The needed ideological change is mainly that of appreciating quality of life rather than economic growth.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to implement the changes.[25]

J. Edward Steiguer summarizes deep ecology's platform in two themes: biocentrism and self-realization.[26] Biocentrism is the controversial "catchword" on which much of deep ecology orients its understanding of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. It ostensibly opposes the frequently cited problem of "anthropocentrism," which Naess and others define as a peculiarly Western tendency to derive the value of everything—human and nonhuman—by its value to humans. It is the explicit or implicit locating of human experience, desire, and need at the center of all existence and, subsequently, the subordination of the corresponding needs of all nonhumans. Deep ecology's critique of anthropocentrism can often lean in a corresponding misanthropic direction when it identifies the human side of the relationship with a kind of ecological "chauvinism" to be, in some instances, aggressively confronted by population control.

In contrast to anthropocentrism, "Biocentrism is the belief that 'all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom.' The key to attaining a biocentric point of view is to realize that 'there are no boundaries and everything is interrelated.'"[27,28] How biocentrism is made practical for politics, culture, and everyday life however, remains somewhat obscure, though this ambiguity appears to be intentional.[29] Prior to enumerating the eight points, Naess and Sessions say that "readers are encouraged to elaborate their own versions of deep ecology, clarify key concepts, and think through the consequences of acting from these principals."[30] Followers of deep ecology realize the biocentric life in their own individual way, guided by these eight general principles. As a result, Naess suggests, individuals develop an environmental philosophy, or "ecosophy," which possesses the authority of "wisdom" as opposed to environmentalism's "shallow" dependence on the authority of science.[31]

Underlying this "ecosophy" is the idea of "self-realization" initiated by what Naess calls a "deep questioning process." Naess wanted followers of deep ecology to abandon the traditional Western anthropocentrism and in-

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stead rely on what he, Sessions, and Devall call “self” to define new values. “Science, we are told, is not needed for self-realization. Neither are logic, deductive reasoning, specific concepts, nor clarity of meaning. All that is required is meditative thinking, local governmental control (the most local being the ‘self’), and intuition about what ought to be.”[32] Naess’s ecosophy is based on a kind of “self-generated wisdom,” uninhibited by reflection and reason, and as the means by which humans acquire full self-realization and their own personal “guide” for respecting the environment. Though rarely made explicit, the parallels between this “self-realization” and Thoreau’s emphasis on autonomy and “Right” are striking. Unlike Thoreau, however, deep ecologists contend that this self-realization is no different than similar notions of the world’s religions, except that deep ecology is apparently more “mature”:

> But the deep ecology sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world. We must see beyond our narrow contemporary cultural assumptions and values, and the conventional wisdom of our time and place, and this is best achieved by the meditative deep questioning process. Only in this way can we hope to attain full mature personhood and uniqueness. . . . This process of the full unfolding of the self can also be summarized by the phrase, “No one is saved until we are all saved.”[33]

Naess has asserted that true followers of deep ecology will embrace these principles of biocentrism and self-realization as a call for political activism, which many of the more radical ecological movements have taken quite seriously. United primarily by an aversion to chauvinistic anthropocentrism, groups such as PETA, Earth First!, and Greenpeace make headlines for doing their part to “save” nonhumans in a manner reminiscent of evangelical Christians’ efforts to save nonbelievers from hell. Naess once set an example of living out his deep ecology when “in Norway . . . [he] once tied himself to the cliffs of a fjord until authorities promised to abandon their plans to build a dam there.”[34]

Deep ecology, in one sense, is not the antimoral “aspiration toward the infinite” which Babbitt was worried about. It demands considerable moral effort and sacrifice. But the ethic of “biocentrism” is contradicted by Naess’s emphasis on self-realization. The radical moral autonomy achieved by “self-realization” is characteristic of the same anthropocentrism which deep ecology laments. Biocentrism violates the moral autonomy and self-realization from which it supposedly arises, because it acts as an external standard. There is no obvious reason, though, why the self-realized individual would choose to be biocentric.

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Deep ecologists might respond and explain that, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the "general will," biocentrism is a natural moral intuition which will emerge when the restraints of civilization are removed and moral autonomy is absolutized. "If everyone achieved this 'self-realization,' they would be biocentric," they might say. Yet the actual failure of the majority of people to achieve this realization means that only an elite few can claim privileged access to this "deep ecology" and moral intuition. And if this morality possesses authority akin to religion, why not proselytize it or even enforce it? Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, explained that those standing outside the general ought to be "forced to be free." If biocentrism is the best outcome for the self-realized person, why not force anthropocentric individuals to be biocentric? While an "imposed biocentrism" may seem extreme, the idyllic environmental imagination of deep ecology lacks the restraints of a moral imagination to prevent these more ominous suggestions from arising. It is no surprise, then when Naess himself writes:

> Within fifty years, either we will need a dictatorship to save what is left of the diversity of life forms, or we will have a shift of values. A shift of our total view such that no dictatorship will be needed. It is thoroughly natural to stop dominating, exploiting, and destroying the planet. A "smooth" way, involving harmonious living with nature, or a "rough" way, involving dictatorship and coercion—those are the options.[35]

IMAGINATION AND "DEEP GREEN RELIGION"

Bron Taylor, who studies the intersection of religion with environmentalism, ecology, and nature, has helped define new fields of inquiry and inspired influential interdisciplinary research regarding the centrality of imagination to understanding environmental thought. According to Taylor, Thoreau blazes a trail for what he calls "dark green religion," defined as a "religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care."[36] Taylor claims that his description of "nature spirituality" is not the same as deep ecology, and he avoids the term to circumvent association with "Arne Naess and the politics of radical environmentalism, and because some proponents of deep ecology reject the idea that it has anything to do with religion."[37] Like deep ecology though, dark green religion has no institutions, sacred texts, no formal clergy or hierarchy and, in theory, no sacraments or liturgy. Yet Thoreau is so important for Taylor that he suggests reorienting the Western calendar to AHDT (After Henry David Thoreau) instead of AD (*anno domine*, "In the Year of Our Lord").[38] Much more explicitly than the deep ecologists, Bron Taylor makes it quite clear Thoreau is the foundational figure for dark green religion.

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Bron Taylor specifically reads Thoreau as laying the groundwork for eight major themes found in most manifestations of dark green religion which read like a definition of the idyllic imagination. First, Thoreau celebrates the "*simple, natural and undomesticated (free) life*."[39] Yet this is more than a suspicion of technology and modern economics. It is, for Taylor, a rejection of civilization itself, and a preference for nonhuman nature over the trivialities of human society. Second, Thoreau emphasizes the "*wisdom of nature*" in that he "embrace[s] . . . his animality and the basis of his epistemological sensuality."[40] In contrast to more positivistic sciences, Thoreau sought a deeply *personal* relationship with nature. Third, Thoreau's way of thinking and acting demonstrated his own "*religion of nature*"[41] by submitting himself to nature's possession and evincing a more pantheistic or even pagan imagination. He did not embrace a conventional notion of an afterlife, according to Taylor, but he looked forward to death as a reunification with the nonhuman world. And, like dark green religion in general, Thoreau's faith in nature came at the cost of whatever authority Christianity may once have held over him. As Dunlap's account and deep ecology demonstrate, this environmental religion is often in deliberate resistance to the doctrines, institutions, and structures that make traditional religions what they are.

The fourth foundational theme for "dark green religion" was Thoreau's tendency to relate notions of justice back to the natural order. Slavery and American imperialism, for example, were evil and unjust because they violated a law of nature. This concern with justice contrasts minimally with the fifth theme of Thoreau's apparently "*ecocentric moral philosophy*," which decenters human interests in favor of living things in general, and essentially rehashes Naess's "biocentrism" under a synonym.[42] Underlying these themes was the sixth, in which Taylor lumps together loyalty to nature and recognition of interconnectedness. Thoreau, like other dark green religionists, recognizes both man's place in nature and the seemingly implicit moral demands such a reality places on the individual.[43] The seventh theme, then, was a belief and a hope (albeit, a reluctant one) that such a moral philosophy, awareness, and loyalty could be taught to the otherwise corrupted descendants of European civilization. Finally, Thoreau evinces what Taylor refers to as "*ambivalence and enigma*."[44] By this he is attempting to describe Thoreau's apparent inconsistencies and complexity due, primarily, to the tension Thoreau experiences between his spirituality and scientific sympathies.

This theme of "ambivalence and enigma" may be one of the reasons for significant disagreements throughout the literature on Thoreau regarding his spirituality and his latent sympathies for paganism, pantheism, and his complicated relationship with Emerson's transcendentalism. Conventional readings describe Thoreau as anticipating deep ecology, biocentrism, and an environmental religion. Others see a more anthropocentric Thoreau or, as

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Buell observed, someone who lived in a tension between the ecocentric and anthropocentric.[45] While Taylor is not prepared to claim Thoreau as *the* founder of dark green religion, he is open to the possibility. Thoreau's eventual embrace of Darwin, according to Bron Taylor, indicated a move away from his transcendental neighbors and toward a more naturalistic spirituality. Regardless of where Taylor places Thoreau religiously, however, his influence on dark green religion remains remarkably important:

> Thoreau has become something of a Rorschach test for people—he is taken as an exemplary social-justice advocate, antiwar crusader, abolitionist, conservationist, deep ecologist, radical environmentalist, and even as an anarchist. These interpretations are often a projection by the interpreters who wish to consider him one of their own. One thing is clear: many who have been engaged in the production of and spread of dark green religion have taken inspiration from Thoreau and consider him an ecospiritual elder. Certainly deep ecologists and radical environmentalists have enthusiastically embraced him.[46]

Like Buell, Bron Taylor notes that a trip to Thoreau's Walden Pond is something of a pilgrimage for deep ecologists, radical environmentalists, and others who are inspired by Thoreau's work.[47] Taylor observes that Thoreau's influence has been less that of an "intellectual elder" and more as a spiritual sage or saint of environmentalism.[48] Texts such as *Walden* and "Walking" have taken on a role akin to sacred scriptures, while Thoreau's hikes and canoe trips, habits and idiosyncrasies have become like the spiritual disciplines and liturgy eschewed by deep ecology and dark green religion. Taylor recalls in his monograph that, "On a number of occasions in green enclaves I have heard activists speak of Thoreau's writings as sacred texts; writings by others evoke similar reverence, typically those by John Muir and Aldo Leopold but also increasingly those of Rachel Carson, Joseph Wood Krutch, Edward Abbey, Loren Eiseley, and a number of others."[49] It is little surprise that these latter "environmental saints" owe a considerable debt to Thoreau.

ARCADIA AND APOCALYPSE

Naess's deep ecology and Bron Taylor's dark green religion represent explicit manifestations of the idyllic environmental imagination's "aspiration toward the infinite" and the temptation toward sham spirituality. Such imagination has several consequences for politics which further expose the idyllic environmental imagination and its tension with the moral environmental imagination. Among the most pervasive and politically significant of these consequences is an enduring apocalypticism.

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A fundamental assumption of many environmentalists is that the nonhuman world is vulnerable. Even if one adopts Barry Commoner's dictum that "nature knows best," and that, left to its own devices, nonhuman nature will manage and repair itself, the sense remains that modern man's interference in nature violates a larger order and purpose that humans either do not understand or deliberately neglect. An impending sense of doom, instability, and failure colors ecological prescriptions, narratives of environmental disorder, and the corresponding works of imagination in film, art, and literature. Popular metaphors of the natural order as a machine, a circle, a "chain of being," a body, or a web leave open the possibility that this order can be corrupted. A circle or a chain can be broken, a body can be afflicted by a disease, or a machine can malfunction. The possibility of an end to the existence of living things, or at least to humans, gives urgency to the cause of environmentalists and has become one of the environmental imagination's most potent images. Buell describes apocalypticism's importance writing:

> Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal. Of no other dimension of contemporary environmentalism, furthermore, can it be so unequivocally said that the role of the imagination is central to the project; for the rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the fate of the world hinges on the arousal of the imagination to sense of crisis.[50]

Buell notes how this apocalypticism and its pervasive influence speak both to the significance of imagination generally and the importance of an apocalyptic vision for the environmental imagination. The very notion of an "apocalypse" is entirely imaginative, in the sense that it is a creative metaphor constructed to provoke action. This is not necessarily the same as eschatology or as a kind of prophetic willing toward final perfection. Instead, for some environmentalists, the apocalypse offers a description of the final, devastating consequences should humans fail to successfully ameliorate environmental disorder. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* serves as a key illustration of apocalypticism by arguing that the failure to eradicate harmful pesticides will result in the gradual extinction of song birds and lead to extensive human health problems.

According to Buell, the use of the apocalyptic metaphor can be characterized by five ingredients. First, is the "dramatization of networked relationships: environmental reality seen and mapped in terms of the web and its cognates."[51] In other words, the interconnectedness and dependence of human and nonhuman nature implies that apocalyptic events will be experienced by everyone, regardless of culpability. The second ingredient is what Buell and others refer to as "biotic egalitarianism." The reality that the apocalypse will not discriminate, in a sense, implies a leveling of value and position between humans and nonhumans. The third and fourth ingredients

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are underdeveloped by Buell, but they are more closely related to Thoreau's influence. As he explains, "Two related modes of Thoreauvian perception are involved here, both Emersonian legacies: the aggrandizement of the minute and the conflation of near and remote."[52] These ingredients seem counterintuitive in one respect. The fear of an impending apocalypse would likely bring certain elements of life into greater focus, creating a resistance to triviality and an emphasis on what is nearest and at hand. Buell suggests, however, that the environmental apocalypticism inspired by Thoreau both provokes biotic egalitarianism and undermines the notion that anything which is equal could at the same time be trivial. Recognition of an ecological interconnectedness and a common fate would also reduce the distance between the "near and remote," temporally and physically. The fifth ingredient, however, is the least Thoreauvian, as the sense of "imminent environmental peril" may not have been on Thoreau's radar.[53] Thoreau was aware of local deforestation and threats to biodiversity, but a fear of pending ecological disasters such as catastrophic climate change were understandably nonissues for him.

Climate change has provided innumerable opportunities for environmental apocalypticism to take on new significance and creative energy. Popular narratives of climate crises warn that rising sea levels will swallow small island states and an increase in temperatures will result in mass extinctions, more violent storms, increased desertification, and depleted crop yields leading to "climate refugees" and wars. These threats are regularly held over the heads of world leaders who are desperately trying to address carbon emission standards and other problems related to climate change. With a number of admittedly alarming exceptions, many of the worst scenarios must remain, for now, material for the imagination and as a foundational narrative for the way in which environmentalism understands itself and what is ultimately at stake in their efforts. This apocalypticism takes on a curious form of dystopianism which, Buell observes, typically has three characteristics: "(1) the vision of exploitation leading to 'overshoot' (excessive demands on the land) or interference producing irreversible degradation; (2) the vision of a tampered-with nature recoiling against humankind in a kind of return of the repressed, and (3) the loss of all escape routes."[54] These elements, far from being relegated to movies and science fiction, have now become the intuition shaping environmental policy, public debate, and scientific research.

Bron Taylor has also observed the importance of apocalypticism for his own articulation of dark green religion and for contemporary manifestations of radical environmentalism. More explicitly than Buell, Taylor recognizes that an apocalyptic metaphor potentially inspires a more politically rebellious, even violent, environmental religion committed to defending its faith and future narrative. "What separates radical environmentalism from many other forms of dark green religion," Taylor observes, "is apocalypticism. But

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it is an apocalypticism that is radically innovative in the history of religion—because it is the first time that an expectation of the end of the known world has been grounded in environmental science."[55]

Bron Taylor's identification of this new apocalypticism as scientifically authoritative means that an apocalypse has, for some, moved beyond mere metaphor. For figures such as James Barnes, there is even an element of hope to an otherwise disconcerting future; at least "there is hope—but not for us."[56] Humanity's inability to restrain its materialism and reproduction has already passed a tipping point. The demise of humans is inevitable and necessary, but Barnes and Taylor find comfort in these predictions. "Nature's laws will eventually reduce the numbers of organisms, like humans, who consume too many calories or produce too much waste."[57] Similar to the eschatology of traditional Christianity, which awaits God's complete redemption of a fallen reality, dark green religion's apocalyptic side waits for nature to redeem and renew itself. Unlike Christianity, however, this redemption involves neither a divinity nor humanity.

Fatalism, misanthropy, and ambivalence open the door to the idyllic environmental imagination. Bron Taylor observes that "[r]adical environmental apocalypticism, then, is deeply ambivalent about catastrophe. Disaster is imminent, it involves the desecration of a sacred world, and it must be resisted. Yet the decline of ecosystems and the collapse of human societies may pave the way back to an earthly paradise."[58] On what grounds, then, should a human base any reverence for nature if our efforts to restore ecological order will be futile? What meaning does a world without human beings have? Like deep ecology's emphasis on self-realization and dark green religion's sham spirituality, environmental apocalypticism has the potential to discourage the very moral effort required to avert disaster. While fear of catastrophic climate change or the spread of diseases caused by pollution may motivate individuals to action, the overwhelming size of the problems and the constant failure to get everyone on board with ecologically sustainable lifestyles, may breed a fatalism like the one expressed by Barnes.

Alternatively, if one has hope in the redemption of earth by means of divine intervention, there may be a temptation, not for fatalism, but for apathy toward the ecological crisis. Anticipation for the destruction or the resurrection of humanity risks relegating environmental causes to the political periphery. Thankfully, an imagination of what the future holds for humans and nonhumans alike need not be the enemy of moral effort. As one of many examples, the Anglican theologian N. T. Wright has pushed back against those within Christianity who discourage care for the nonhuman world on the basis of dispensationalist eschatology. In his recent book, *Surprised by Scripture*, he writes:

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> One day God will renew the whole created order, and according to Romans 8, he will do this by setting over it, as he always intended, his image-bearing creatures. They will reflect God's glory into his world and bring God's saving justice to bear, putting the world to rights and making the desert blossom like the rose. And if we are already in Christ, already indwelt by the Spirit, we cannot say we will wait until God does it in the end. We must be God's agents in bringing, at the very least, signs of that renewal in the present. And that must mean we are called in the present to search out every way in which the present, groaning creation can be set free from at least part of its bondage and experience some of the freedom that comes when the children of God are glorified because, in Christ and by the Spirit, we already are. To deny a Christian passion for ecological work, for putting the world to rights insofar as we can right now, is to deny either the goodness of creation or the power of God in the resurrection and the Spirit, and quite possibly both.[59]

While Wright's admonition may be too anthropocentric for mainstream environmentalism, and might carry little authority beyond his fellow Christians, his thoughts are instructive and resist apocalypticism and the idyllic environmental imagination. Whether the future holds infinite joy or disaster for humanity our efforts toward ecological well-being matter *now*. After all, the future must necessarily be mysterious until it becomes the present. Predictions fail, variables are overlooked, and changes come unexpectedly. Even if one embraces a scientifically grounded apocalypticism, there is always the chance that the science is imperfect.

While Thoreau's reflections never reached the level of dystopia or even full-fledged apocalypticism, he did inspire the kind of imagination that sparks these visions. The fate of nonhuman nature and the fate of man were deeply implicated in one another, and should man fail to fulfill his obligations to the environment, he may not become extinct, but he will be treated as mercilessly as the bloated bodies washed ashore, which Thoreau describes following a shipwreck on Cape Cod. He writes:

> On the whole, it was not so impressive a scene as I might have expected. If I had found one body cast upon the beach in some lonely place it would have affected me more. I sympathized rather with the winds and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day. If this was the law of Nature, why waste any time in awe or pity? If the last day were come, we should not think so much about the separation of friends or the blighted prospects of individuals. I saw that corpses might be multiplied, as on the field of battle, till they no longer affected us in any degree, as exceptions to the common lot of humanity. . . . Why care for these dead bodies? They really have no friends but the worms or fishes.[60]

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Thoreau saw in the aftermath of the shipwreck a reminder of man's common fate. He will die, though, like Wright, Thoreau is optimistic this life is not all there is. The picture Thoreau paints however, provokes a sense that man's fate will still be at the hands of the same Nature that provided Thoreau with an ideal companion and Arcadian refuge.

Babbitt's term, "aspiration to the infinite," is meant to characterize the romantic or pantheistic tendency to ascribe divinity to the nonhuman world and to infuse one's affection for nature with a spirituality and religious vocabulary incongruous with nonhuman nature as it is actually experienced. This tendency also corresponds to the desire to remove the moral restraints of tradition and institutions. This is why, Babbitt observes, that "no age ever grew so ecstatic over natural beauty as the nineteenth century, at the same time no age ever did so much to deface nature. No age ever so exalted the country over town, and no age ever witnessed such a crowding into urban centers."[61] Though an unprecedented amount of work has been done toward the end of environmental well-being and ecological order, the twentieth century could hardly claim to have improved on the nineteenth. Deep ecology, dark green religion, and other forms of environmentalism that are rooted in the work of the romantics and transcendentalists of the nineteenth century have found larger and more diverse audiences, but widespread environmental crises persist. Whether it is the rhetorical religiosity of Dunlap or the emotionalist spirituality of deep ecology, a religion without order or something akin to liturgy, remains ill-equipped to meet environmental challenges. A moral, more sacramental environmental imagination provides a framework for a religious environmentalism that is not fatalistic, apathetic, escapist, or misanthropic.

The moral imagination, as described thus far, has not discouraged affection toward the nonhuman world, the appreciation of natural beauty or the causes of conservation. Instead, the moral imagination appeals to proportion, tradition, humility, responsibility, and restraint as fundamental to what makes men and women fully human. The moral imagination also elevates the very virtues which discourage overconsumption of natural resources, pollution, and animal cruelty. In contrast to attempts to "disenchant" the natural world or to dismiss nature's importance for religion, the moral imagination seeks to identify a role for religion that is appropriate relative to humans' actual, concrete experience of the natural world. The moral imagination resists extremes, emotionalism, ideology, and romantic idealism, but religion need not be complicit in any of these problems. Indeed, it is to the credit of many environmental thinkers, including Thoreau, for recognizing the spiritual implications of environmental issues and questions. If, as both Buell and Babbitt assume, that environmental crises are also crises of imagination, then religious questions *must* be attended to.

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In light of the moral imagination and the importance of religion, how does the tension between the moral and idyllic play out? Another way of framing this tension is to place what Babbitt calls "an aspiration toward the infinite" and "sham spirituality" in direct contrast with a sacramental spirituality.

The first task for the moral imagination's resistance to sham spirituality is to establish that there is no need to invent an entirely *new* religion and to dismiss older spiritual traditions and doctrines in order for an environmentally friendly faith to emerge. The amount of scholarship demonstrating how Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the many Native American faiths are compatible with environmental concerns is impressive and compelling. These faiths provide ready-made means by which the environmental imagination may be cultivated in light of, not in spite of, the particular religion. Starting over with an entirely new religion would potentially cut adherents off to important resources while also cultivating "sham spirituality."

Within the context of sham spirituality, the escapist eschews acting on sentiments or *living* one's religion because he or she views emotion as sufficient for demonstrating a commitment to a given cause or desire. Imagining or feeling something is adequate for this type of adherent. The fanatic, on the other hand, has no intention of restraining his or her emotions or actions. The spirituality of the fanatic affirms his or her impulses and holds nothing back, ignoring historical reality along the way. Emotion and desire legitimize action, and external authority is not accepted as a counterbalance or boundary.

Sacramental environmental thought, on the other hand, is characterized by historically sensitive action, humility, and a preference for human dignity. Sacramentality is the synthesis of the universal and the particular, and is diametrically opposed to sham spirituality. It is a disposition which neither disparages the material nor neglects what is beyond it, and it resists, in a sense, both naturalism and supernaturalism without abandoning the natural or the supernatural. The nonhuman world is experienced as something more than material, but is not itself divine. The manner in which the material participates in and reveals the immaterial, however, is precisely what gives nature value and meaning.

Sacramentality is also characterized by "historically sensitive action," which is defined as an awareness of the reality of the world we find ourselves in and a willingness to face circumstances and the contingencies of human nature with courage and creativity. Humility is a necessary condition for this sensitivity, in that it allows one to admit the limits of knowledge and the inability to stand outside historical circumstances. Humility also allows for the reverence and mystery which sustains the synthesis of universal and particular and resists escapism and fanaticism as well as fatalism and apathy. It resists the notion that finite human imagination can know the universal without the particular and vice versa. The importance of a tradition further

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reinforces humility by cultivating a kind of intuition which recognizes this sacramentality while acting as a check against an imbalanced appreciation for universal or particular.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of the sacramental environmental imagination is an emphasis on the dignity of other human persons. Humility reminds us that nonhuman nature is something that is shared across time and through communities and families, and it recognizes that of all the fixtures in the material world, human beings inhabit a unique and elevated role as participants in an immaterial or universal order. In contrast to Thoreau's friends of the idyllic imagination and the elevation of sentimental environmentalism and sham spirituality above human dignity, the moral imagination conceives of distinctive, individual persons differentiated by an inexhaustible complexity. This dignity, grounded deeply in world religions, need not materialize at the expense of the environment. As Pope Francis has preached, human dignity is respected precisely by actively caring for the environment. He writes in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, "Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture."[62] Pope Benedict XVI was similarly convinced that the choice between human well-being and environmental well-being was a false choice. In his "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace" (January 1, 2007) Benedict wrote:

> Alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a "human" ecology, which in turn demands a "social" ecology. All this means that humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that *disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence*, and vice versa.[63]

The environmental visions of Francis and Benedict have a number of parallels in Protestantism and Islam, and they all draw on the timeless resources of their traditions and liturgies to navigate the many difficult questions provoked by environmental crises. While the idyllic-moral tension is by no means absent from world religions in other areas, they continue to find the resources to resist temptations toward sham spirituality, escapism, and environmental apathy and to affirm mankind's responsibility for environmental well-being.

NOTES

1. Babbitt, (2009) p. 282.
2. Babbitt, (2009) p. 284.

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3. Babbitt, (2009) p. 286.
4. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 19.
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Larzer Ziff, (New York: Penguin, 1982) p. 410.
6. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 44.
7. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 44.
8. Thoreau, *A Week*, p. 109.
9. Christopher A. Dustin, "Thoreau's Religion," in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Jack Turner, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2009).
10. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1 of *Cultural Liturgies*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) p. 86.
11. James K. A. Smith, (2009) p. 86
12. Dolores LaChapelle, "Appendix F: Ritual is Essential," in *Deep Ecology*, ed. by Bill Devall and George Sessions, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985) p. 250.
13. Thomas Dunlap observes that "Environmentalists do not, generally, believe the movement constitutes a religion (and in conventional terms it does not), and they are uncomfortable with religious terms, but they ask religious questions: what purpose do humans have in the universe, and what must they do to fulfill it?" Thomas R. Dunlap, *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest*, (Seattle: University of Washington, 2004) p. 13. Also see James Murray, "Environmentalism Is Not a Religion," *Guardian*, June 26, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/jun/26/climate-change-skeptic-religion.
14. Buell, (1995) p. 371.
15. Thoreau, *Walden*, "Higher Laws," p. 262. He writes earlier that "no human being, past the age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which holds its life by the same tenure that he does" (p. 260), but he then admits that "The practical objection to animal food in my case was its uncleanness; and, besides, when I had caught and cleaned and cooked and eaten my fish, they seemed not to have fed me essentially. It was insignificant and unnecessary, and cost more than it came to" (p. 261). His position is more complicated then, but he ultimately believes that "it is part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized" (p. 263).
16. Buell, (1995) pp. 316–18.
17. Two excellent works showing how Protestantism, in particular, gave rise to American environmentalism are Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*, (Oakland, CA: University of California, 2015); and Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (New York: Oxford University, 2015).
18. Dunlap, (2004) p. 4.
19. Dunlap, (2004) p. 9.
20. Dunlap, (2004) pp. 9–10.
21. J. Edward Steiguer, *The Origins of Modern Environmental Thought*, (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2006) p. 186.
22. Steiguer, (2006) p. 185.
23. George Sessions, "Deep Ecology: Introduction," in Michael E. Zimmerman, et al., eds. *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 2nd ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998) p. 173.
24. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered*, (Layton, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985) p. 70. I use Steiguer's summary or restatement cited below. These eight points are a revision and clarification of seven characteristics enumerated in Arne Naess's seminal article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary," *Inquiry*, vol. 16, 1973, pp. 95–100.
25. Steiguer, (2006) p. 188.
26. Steiguer, (2006) p. 188.
27. Devall and Sessions, (1985) p. 67.
28. Steiguer, (2006) p. 188.

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29. Naess does write, however, that "No real progress toward solving the ecological crisis would be made unless ecological problems were seen as questions of policy." "Politics and the Ecological Crisis: An Introductory Note," in *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, *Volume X: Deep Ecology of Wisdom*, ed. by Harold Glasser and Alan Drengson, (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2005) p. 191.
30. Devall and Sessions, (1985) p. 70.
31. Naess, (1973) p. 99.
32. Steiguer, (2006) p. 190.
33. Devall and Sessions, (1985) p. 67.
34. Steiguer, (2006) p. 186.
35. Arne Naess from a 1982 interview quoted in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by George Sessions (Boston: Shambala, 1995) p. 28. To be fair, Naess long foresaw accusations of a "fascist" potentiality in deep ecology. In an essay entitled, "Antifascist Character of the Eight Points of the Deep Ecology Movement," he reiterates deep ecologists' commitment to nonviolence (Gandhi is a major influence), tolerance, democracy, inclusiveness, and the intrinsic value of all living things. But he also remains committed to the notion of human population control that is ultimately antagonistic to these same claims. At its heart, Naess concedes that deep ecology is more about a *feeling* which a diverse number of people have, but how those feelings are ordered remains undefined. Arne Naess, "Antifascist Character of the Eight Points of the Deep Ecology Movement," in *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, *Volume X: Deep Ecology of Wisdom*, ed. by Harold Glasser and Alan Drengson, (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2005).
36. Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2010) p. ix.
37. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 224.
38. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 58.
39. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 51. Emphasis in original.
40. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 51. Emphasis in original.
41. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 51. Emphasis in original.
42. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 52. Emphasis in original.
43. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 53.
44. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 54. Emphasis in original.
45. For the purposes of this study, a substantive, politically-significant difference between "biocentric" and "ecocentric" is *not* assumed.
46. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 57.
47. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 57.
48. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 58.
49. Bron Taylor, (2010) p. 57.
50. Buell, (1995) pp. 284–85.
51. Buell, (1995) p. 302.
52. Buell, (1995) p. 304.
53. Buell, (1995) p. 305.
54. Buell, (1995) p. 308.
55. Bron Taylor, (2012) p. 84.
56. James Barnes, "Dieback: A Vision of Darkness," *Earth First!*, vol. 17, no. 8, (1997) p. 13.
57. Bron Taylor, (2012) p. 85.
58. Bron Taylor, (2012) p. 85.
59. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues*, (New York: HarperOne, 2014) p. 95.
60. Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, first published 1865, (New York: Penguin Books, 1987) pp. 13–14.
61. Babbitt, (2009) p. 301.
62. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si (On Care for Our Common Home)*, eection IV.43, Vatican Website http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco _ 20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
63. Pope Benedict XVI, "The 'Ecology of Peace,'" in *The Environment*, collected and ed. by Jacquelyn Lindsey, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012) p. 28.

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Chapter Nine

Arcadian Ecology

The most underappreciated aspect of Thoreau's environmental imagination and political thought was his intuition of the nature of science. He lived in a thrilling time for those inclined toward scientific studies and was caught up in the excitement. Thoreau recorded thousands of scientific observations of Concord's flora and fauna, and he read widely in the burgeoning natural sciences. Laura Dassow Walls observes that in Thoreau's day:

> Geology was deepening time from thousands to millions of years; astronomy measured the distance to the nearest stars in light years; physics had united the mysterious forces of electricity and magnetism; voyages of exploration were uncovering a staggering variety of life forms, while biology was tracking the ultimate principles common to all life. Technologies such as the railroad and the telegraph were altering the face of the continent and the pace of human communication.[1]

While the word "scientist" had yet to take hold in the common conversation of the mid-nineteenth century, the "man of science" had much to be excited about. Yet with this new found knowledge came risks and temptations about which Thoreau was more sensitive and self-conscious than most. Potential problems and opportunities abounded as new tools were invented, mysteries were "solved," old prejudices and myths were challenged, and man's "power" over nature and each other was revealed in dramatic fashion.

In order to adequately appreciate the importance of Thoreau's intuition regarding science, it is necessary to consider how science will fit in the working theory of imagination. The challenge is that the methods and discoveries of the natural and physical sciences have long presented both a great opportunity and a grave danger. There was a temptation then, as now, to absolutize

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science's capacity for knowledge and utility,[2] and grant it a level of authority out of proportion to what it could legitimately claim. "When supreme moral issues are involved," Irving Babbitt observed, "[science] is . . . only a multiplying device. If there is rightness at the center, it will no doubt multiply the rightness. If, on the other hand, there is any central error, the peripheral repercussion, with men bound together as they are at present, will be terrific."[3] Science, as such, is not inherently given to a moral or idyllic imagination, but given humans' temptation to pride, excess, and a failure to recognize the limitations of the intellect, much is at stake in the way one imagines the product and processes of science.

Science also participates in a curious paradox. "Although natural science is often regarded as the very model for the search for truth," Ryn observes, "it involves a deliberate distortion of experience for the sake of practical ends."[4] Indeed, by striving for a level of unachievable objectivity, abstraction, and dispassionate analysis, science can only *see* imperfectly and incompletely.[5] By elevating abstraction in particular, science obscures more than it reveals. This need not be a criticism as the very objective of many scientific inquiries is to narrowly focus on phenomena and objects to better understand them individually. As Benedetto Croce recognized, science can provide "useful fictions," which may extend the historical knowledge scientists otherwise eschew.[6] Yet by removing the objects from their historical context, scientists necessarily see an incomplete picture. There are always other variables and influences that are neglected, unknown, or irremovable. The scientific method is an ideal and an abstraction. Failure to admit this limitation is characteristic of the idyllic imagination, which overestimates humans' capacity for comprehensive knowledge and understanding.

It would be a mistake to read these warnings of Croce and Babbitt as disparaging reason itself, however, or as limiting the natural and physical sciences to a merely pragmatic enterprise of classification and mathematics. Ryn rightly resists this temptation by identifying a more philosophical or, from Croce's perspective, more *scientific* reason to supplement these pragmatic categories.[7] For Ryn, reason is a form of consciousness and "knowledge of reality rests upon a certain orientation of the will and upon the corresponding quality of imagination (intuition) that the will begets. Reason is dependent for the truth and comprehensiveness of its concepts on the depth and scope of the material that it receives from the imagination."[8] Philosophical reason can be corrupted or enhanced by the imagination and will on which it depends, and it strives to be historical by synthesizing the universal and the particular.[9] The natural sciences, if they do not achieve the elevated philosophical status which Croce describes, are not entirely uprooted from reality. The moral imagination recognizes that this limited rootedness in

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reality requires viewing scientific concepts as provisional, while the idyllic imagination would identify these same concepts as more definitive and authoritative than they have grounds to claim.

THE "TRUE MAN OF SCIENCE"

The possibilities, promise, dangers, and limitations of science were topics of rapidly increasing importance in Thoreau's day. In the years after his stay at Walden Pond, specifically, he read widely in natural history, made thousands of records of his observations of animals and plants, was a member of the Boston Society of Natural History, and even acquired various specimens for their collections. Indeed, the longer he lived the more time he spent documenting the natural history of Concord and the surrounding area. Thoreau even inspired a similar curiosity in his neighbors who regularly brought him their discoveries and questions. In addition to his collecting, he followed the lead of Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Darwin by focusing on patterns and relationships in nature. He took up the study of seed dispersion, forest succession, and the characteristics of wild fruits. His last lecture was given on the topic of "Wild Apples" in February 1860 and received an enthusiastic reception. While he made considerable strides in developing his own scientific prowess over the final decades of his life, his untimely death cut short what was already an impressive self-education in the natural sciences.

Given that his scientific efforts were largely self-taught, Thoreau's precision and depth of observation are impressive. He had drawn enough attention to his studies to be invited to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). He accepted the offer, but would later decline to renew his membership ostensibly due to his inability to attend the meetings. The initial invitation though, provoked him to reflect on the AAAS' request for new members to identify one's field of scientific interest. In a revealing journal entry, he writes that his "field" is a subject of great value, but one which the larger scientific community does not recognize. That is, Thoreau claims to engage "in a science which deals with the higher law."[10] So instead of identifying himself as a scientist, proper, he observes: "The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations."[11]

By his own admission, then, he was no naturalist or scientist in the commonly accepted sense. But his observations and even recommendations were no less respected and recognized by others of Concord and beyond. He had an unusual capacity for identifying in nature more than its interrelatedness,

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order, and complexity. He could identify a profound meaning and symbolism that one was unlikely to find in other scientific works of the mid-nineteenth century.

Thoreau was not entirely in step with the other scientific minds of his day. He was critical of the way the burgeoning sciences seemed to neglect the whole of which their particular objects were but a part. Thoreau was particularly suspicious of the ideal of a narrow objectivity championed by science. He found such a goal both undesirable and impossible:

> He is not a true man of science who does not bring some sympathy to his studies, and expect to learn something by behavior as well as by application. . . . The fact which interests us most is the life of the naturalist. The purest science is still biographical. Nothing will dignify and elevate science while it is sundered so wholly from the moral life of its devotee, and he professes another religion than it teaches, and worships at a foreign shrine. Anciently the faith of a philosopher was identical with his system, or, in other words, his view of the universe.[12]

In addition, then, to identifying science as "biographical," Thoreau hints at the importance of imagination in scientific inquiry. The Ancient philosopher's "faith" and "view of the universe" were inseparable from the system he subscribed to. "There is more religion in men's science" he writes, "than there is science in their religion."[13] This also meant that science must be experiential and historical. "The natural history of man himself is still being gradually written," Thoreau remarks. "Men are knowing enough after their fashion."[14] Knowledge is less a moment and more a movement. "The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy."[15] No method, properly speaking, can achieve the insights provided by a direct encounter with, and sympathy for, nature.

There is less distance, if there is any, between the scientist and the object of his inquiry. Thoreau proposes a science that wills and feels its way to knowledge, and one where success is dependent on the inquirer's moral character. Still, in his aversion to method and machinery, he risks dismissing otherwise salutary opportunities afforded by science to *see* historical reality in new and deeper ways. Thoreau recognizes the provisional nature of scientific concepts, observing that "the universe will not wait to be explained. Whoever seriously attempts a theory of it is already behind his age. His yea has reserved no nay for the morrow."[16] But tentative concepts can still be of use and likely contain valuable truths.

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Thoreau, then, is no idyllic champion of science, though he does potentially underappreciate its benefits. "There is always," he observes, "a chasm between knowledge and ignorance, which the steps of science can never pass."[17] Science is fundamentally limited, but it is not useless. Thoreau encouraged scientists to *see* more than what can be measured.[18] Furthermore, the facts the scientist uncovers are not self-interpreting. There is a moral and spiritual side to experience which science does not account for. "The poet," however, "uses the results of science and philosophy and generalizes their widest deductions."[19] This was an ideal Thoreau himself tried to exemplify. His essay on "A Natural History of Massachusetts" is filled with poetry. His late natural history writings, though full of taxonomy and description, are interspersed throughout with a more poetic idiom that appreciates both detail and beauty: "The eye which can appreciate the naked and absolute beauty of a scientific truth," he writes, "is far more rare than that which is attracted by a moral one. Few detect the morality in the former."[20] Nature and the world humans encounter defy simple description and separation.

Thoreau lives in a tension between the moral and idyllic imagination, but in the realm of science he favors the moral over the idyllic. As Laura Walls observed:

> [Thoreau] finally could not accept the idealist move, to reach the universal by annihilating the restraints of the local and particular; nor did he accept the limited and methodically realized aims of the scientist's methods. Or rather, he *did* accept them both—by a process of reconciliation modeled for him in much of the discourse of the time, which sought to bring together polar opposites into new, progressive, higher unities.[21]

As opposed to the increasing fragmentation of science in the late nineteenth century or to the more transcendental holism of Emerson, Thoreau offered a synthesis of the universal and the particular as necessary elements of science and as a way of intuiting the whole of which the particulars of nature were a part. According to Walls, Thoreau achieved this by reconciling transcendentalism and empiricism and resisted disciplinary fragmentation and the separation of "hard" sciences from more humanistic pursuits. Furthermore, "Thoreau was not being drawn away from poetry, from romantic or transcendental nature, toward a dry, resistant, and threatening form of scientism that was drowning his epiphanies with facts, He wished his epiphanies to happen *through* facts, through sharp and actual experience with real things."[22] In this way, Thoreau demonstrated a considerable debt both to Alexander von Humboldt and to Charles Darwin. But he also mounted a distinctive resistance to the abandonment of the otherwise admirable contributions of romanticism to the development of modern science.

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Alfred Tauber, for example, takes Walls's reading further by observing that Thoreau's sense of "organic unity of thought and the harmonization of all knowledge" was primarily informed by "an aestheticism of Imagination."[23] And that imagination shares with Humboldt as well as Göethe, a commitment to the unity of nature, to nature's dynamic and living character, and to the interconnectedness of "forces" and "objects."[24] Furthermore, Thoreau's approach to science and knowledge in general was distinguished by his "self-conscious awareness of himself as 'knower'—as self-distinct from and yet in nature."[25] His inquiries were not merely aimed at uncovering objective facts, but were deeply personal efforts at *valuing* what he encountered.[26]

The modern distinction or separation between facts and values would be incoherent to Thoreau. Instead of a science that tried to "disenchant" the world, and purify the pursuit of knowledge as an impersonal, amoral enterprise, Thoreau sought to know the good, true, and beautiful in a deliberately moral manner, ". . . to know the world is to know it morally, in the sense of assigning it value,"[27] Tauber summarizes. The problem, which does not appear to concern Tauber, is that, without drawing on a broader historical and philosophical tradition, Thoreau's science risks reinforcing the dangerous notion of rewilding discussed earlier: "[I]nstead of seeking a unifying Reason, instead of attempting to bridge a divide between ourselves and nature, [Thoreau] admonished that we should recognize that we *are* nature, or, as he put it, that we should acknowledge our own wildness."[28]

Thoreau's recognition, noted by Tauber, that there is always something within human beings (whether labeled as "wild" or something else) which cannot be known in a complete sense points to the moral imagination's admission of both the limitedness of knowledge and inexhaustible depth of human persons. Yet, by not recognizing anything *beyond* nature, Thoreau has left himself no means by which to ground the *value* Tauber identifies. The value becomes radically subjective. Indeed, by first conflating the divine/infinite with nature and now the self with nature, both the divine and man have nearly been abolished.

Thoreau, by resisting an arrogant scientism, risked coming full circle by way of an extreme naturalism. While he is willing to admit the limits of knowledge and the subjective reality of scientific inquiry, he struggles to admit of any reality beyond nature or beyond the self that is nature. It would be inaccurate to identify Thoreau as a thoroughgoing materialist, but he may have moved in this direction more and more throughout his life. Yet he would not move nearly as far as modern science in cultivating such reductionist imagination. Leaving Thoreau behind, in this regard, is more to the detriment than to the benefit of later environmentalists.

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SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

Science and environmentalism have a complicated history as both partners and opponents. While science and technology offer much in the way of knowledge and solutions for environmental problems, they are also the incubator for pollution-creating technologies and ecological disorder. The insights of science are necessary for accurately diagnosing and confronting environmental disorder, but they are not sufficient. The challenge for environmental politics is to find ways, not merely of acquiring knowledge, but to acquire authoritative knowledge and to correctly apply it. Environmental policy-makers also have to discern between competing and contradictory streams of knowledge, and to maintain a relationship between politics and science that resists dehumanizing the former and corrupting the latter.

The relationship between science and political environmentalism is one area where the aftermath of Thoreau is felt the least, but it is where his voice is sorely needed. While recovering this side of Thoreau cannot resolve all the tensions, it can reorient the imagination to think about knowledge differently and reconfigure its place in political life. Returning to Thoreau will also not restore to science a level of authority that eliminates doubt and skepticism, nor is the goal to elevate science to *the* seat of reason, uncorrupted and unstained by subjectivity. Instead, Thoreau's moral imagination moderates the claims of science and provides grounds for assigning scientific information a prominent, but not an all-encompassing, role in the formation of environmental policy and thought.

A representative example for the kind of mindset at issue here is that of the influential authors, Paul and Anne Ehrlich. Paul, author of the environmental classic, *The Population Bomb*, and his wife lament the extent to which so-called brown lashers and the wise-use movement have so successfully undermined the political impact of the natural sciences. In their bluntly titled book, *Betrayal of Science and Reason*, they confront the contemporary tendency to acquiesce to antiscientific or pseudoscientific arguments that are either patently false, at worst, or opposed to the reigning environmental consensus, at best. Rooted, in part, within the tradition of Creationism and political conservatism, many Americans continue to deny the existence of catastrophic climate change or believe its eventual effects are overstated. Such denial may also be motivated by economic interests, which, in the Ehrlichs's estimation, are less likely to corrupt the pro-environmental organizations and environmental scientists.[29] Indeed, the very structure and competitiveness of professional science overcomes baser inclinations. "With trivial exceptions," the Ehrlichs assert, "cheating is not possible; a person can't fake being a world-class scientist any more than one can fake being a world-class pitcher or concert pianist. It's not that scientists are intrinsically more honest or more objective than other human beings, it's that the system is

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fundamentally adversarial, and nature itself is the ultimate judge of who is correct."[30] In other words, the argument is circular. The scientific concept of "natural selection" is what gives natural science validity and protection against widespread abuse, misunderstanding, and intellectual deformation. Science, for the Ehrlichs, gives the foundation for its own authority. Following a crude Darwinism, the smarter and more accurate findings are confirmed by nature itself, and the losers simply need to conform.

To the Ehrlichs, the continuing proliferation of superstitious and religious beliefs "threaten rational scientific inquiry by rejecting the methods and procedures . . . that characterize modern science."[31] The enduring belief or influence of Creationism and the lack of scientific literacy among Americans especially, has created a massive gap between what scientists and the everyday voter believes. Furthermore, religions supposedly tend toward claims of certainty and proof that the scientist cannot claim. Where science draws its confidence, though, is by overwhelming amounts of evidence and widespread consensus within the scientific community. It is a hard-won conformity to a scientific orthodoxy that offers scientists more solid ground to stand on than allegedly speculative religion. It is no wonder then that the Ehrlichs remark, "Scientists tend to ignore creationists, flat-earth believers, alchemists, and builders of perpetual-motion machines."[32] Such individuals have "betrayed science and reason," and poisoned a national conversation in which they are not welcome.

Another telling example is that found in Andrew Dobson's *Green Political Thought*, where he attempts to bring a level of coherence to environmentalism as a political ideology called ecologism. "The analytic temptation" he writes, "is to see [ecologism] as a renewal of the Romantic tradition. . . . So we cast ecologism in terms of passion opposing reason, of the joys of a bucolic life and of mystery against transparency."[33] While Dobson admits the presence of pastoralism and "awe" in environmentalism, "modern green politics," he claims, "turns out to be based on a self-consciously hard-headed assessment of the unsustainability of current political and economic practices—it is remarkable, indeed to see the extent to which the success of modern political ecology has been mediated and sustained by scientific research."[34] For Dobson, conceiving a "green movement," as a resurgence of Romanticism and an emphasis on intuition will blind people to the benefits of rationalism. Indeed, as Tim Hayward claims, "the ecological challenge . . . can be seen as a renewal of the enlightenment project itself."[35]

Dobson, however, contradicts his own claims in his conclusion by admitting the need for a "Utopian picture" for effective political efforts.[36] Ecologism, he argues, fulfills this need and inspires Greens's creativity. Furthermore, "the Utopian vision provides the indispensable fundamentalist well of inspiration from which green activists, even the most reformist and respectable, need continually to draw."[37] In other words, ecologism is grounded in a

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particular imagination, and much less on a strictly scientific rationalism. After all, "Utopia," literally means "No Place"—a location inaccessible to scientific inquiry.

Both the Ehrlichs and Dobson rightly emphasize the importance of grounding environmental policy and beliefs in concrete, scientific evidence. They realize that simply feeling affection for the planet does not beget effective policy or political movements. They miss, however, the reality that scientific knowledge as such is not self-interpreting. Reason depends on the concepts formed in the imagination, so if such concepts are malformed, reason betrays *us*, in a sense. Science requires a broader context, humility, and a commitment to moderation to be true, compelling, and more humane.

IMAGINATION AND THE ORIGINS OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Centuries of struggle between the idyllic and moral imagination in the realm of science, however, will not be resolved any time soon. After all, science cannot exist independent of the scientist, and the tensions within their own imaginations color those within the larger scientific community. Before addressing how a return to Thoreau helps to counter this problem, it will be helpful to look at the example of global environmental governance, and the critical role science plays in it.

The nature of environmental problems, and their tendency to ignore political and geographical boundaries, lends itself to the development of international institutions for cooperation on environmental policy. Through countless NGOs, IGOs, the United Nations and others, decision makers from across the world work toward agreements and treaties aimed at cooperative ecological responsibility. Such collaboration carries considerable consequences politically, economically, and in terms of national security. The agreements often break down, are corrupted in various ways, are misinterpreted, ignore critical information, or fail to equitably distribute the burden of what needs to be done. The history of global environmental governance is not one of constant failure though, and the necessity of international cooperation helps prevent countries from simply walking away entirely from the negotiation table.

The origins and character of global environmental governance, however, is a matter of dispute. Some scholars view environmentalism's past in conservation, emerging in the late nineteeenth and early twentieth century, as fundamentally unable to conceive of the international collaboration and institutions that were needed to solve environmental problems. These earlier models of environmental governance were allegedly more "humanitarian" and sentimental in nature, but not susceptible to offering a universal common

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ground of knowledge and assumptions on which environmental treaties could be made.[38] Early environmentalism imagined the world in less materialistic terms, conceiving of the ecological crisis as a moral and spiritual problem that required a moral and spiritual response. The "humanitarian model of nature protection," as David John Frank calls it, focused primarily on cultivating compassion, sympathy, and community. Natural *beauty* was particularly paramount as was moral responsibility. The moral integrity of nature was prioritized over its physical integrity.[39]

Gradually, Frank argues, the scientific model/rationale for nature protection replaced the humanitarian model because science could offer a language that was more "rationalized" and more "universalized." More specifically, the scientific model "depicts the human-nature relationship as an interdependent physical system and promotes nature protection for the physical sustenance of humanity."[40] Emphasizing the ecological and material integrity of the environment emerged as more conducive to international cooperation than appeals to the moral and spiritual side of environmental problems.

Why did this happen? Frank's narrative does not appeal to the importance of imagination explicitly but it more than hints at its importance. For him, changes in what he calls "world culture," "world organization," and "nation-state politics" were the driving force in the move from humanitarian nature protection to more scientific nature protection.

According to Frank, the primary changes in world culture were from the more hierarchical and segmented aspects of humanitarianism to the "inclusive and universalistic" paradigm of science. From the standpoint of culture, the scientific model places nature on a more equal footing with humanity than the humanitarian model, which was more decentralized and local in focus. Science is also more "abstracted and lawlike,"[41] making application across international boundaries seemingly more plausible. Furthermore, due to a common natural history in evolution and in the shared prehistoric landmass of Pangaea "the generic features of natural phenomena [more readily] come to the fore, unrestricted by local peculiarities and geographical boundaries."[42] Science also provides a more rationalized way of approaching environmental problems that is more compatible with policy systems, economics, and the move away from the aestheticism of the humanitarian way of thinking, to a conception of nature as an ecosystem critical for the support of human life. Finally, the scientific model helps undermine and eliminate the separation between humans and the rest of the natural world historically asserted by monotheistic religions.[43] These cultural shifts inspired changes in "world organization." More centralized entities of environmental governance not only seemed to make more sense, but, increasingly, the inevitable and only responsible solution to ecological crises. The decline in the authority of

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creationism and world religions, and associated cultural constructs, opened the door to the more universal idiom of science that humanitarian models could not provide.[44]

The move toward a more scientifically grounded organization has created a rationale of "recipes" in which each problem can be answered with a particular prescription each time. And the primary responsibility for administering the solution has been attached almost exclusively to the nation-state, which alone has the legitimacy and power to do what needs to be done. Theoretically, the IGOs, NGOs, and similar organizations have also achieved, under the scientific model, a more disinterested and universalistic orientation that makes them more successful at promoting the collective good and uniformity.

A scientific rationale establishes, with greater authority, "the parameters of reality," allowing the "formal international sector [to constitute] the basic possibilities for action."[45] Frank views scientific reality as self-interpreting, in that, identifying what is, suggests both the normative principles and the corresponding activities that ought to follow.

Changes in world culture meant change in world organization which, in turn, change national policies. Over time, then, the scientific model, or the "ecosystem model," has had more impact on national policies because scientists and science "are housed in a worldwide organizational system—universities and schools. This allows scientific claims with regard to nature to find harbor in local organizational structures with exceptional rapidity."[46]

THOREAU, SCIENCE, AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION

Frank's narrative is deeply problematic, but it is characteristic of ubiquitous assumptions about the development of Western politics and thought; namely the oversimplified notion that paradigms of morality and truth rooted in religion and classical traditions have been delegitimized and "conquered" by scientific rationality. Yet even Frank admits that his story "does not say whether all the world-cultural, world-political, and national-political changes actually make any difference."[47] Instead, the great value afforded by the rise of global institutions is the establishment of "parameters of legitimacy within which organizations and policies—at the global, national, and local levels—arise and operate."[48]

The problem with the humanitarian-to-scientific narrative is that it takes for granted the public authority of science as a consistent or legitimate source of truth. As contemporary arguments in the United States about climate change or childhood vaccinations show, consensus among scientists does not necessarily equate to consensus among voters, politicians, and policy-makers. Underlying both the rejection and acceptance of science is an imagina-

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tion primed to view certain insights as genuine knowledge and others as false. The scientific rationale, in other words, does not overcome or exclude the "humanitarian" imagination. Aside from the deliberate biasing or corruption of scientific research, even the most "objective" and careful scientific information does not develop in a dispassionate vacuum. This dynamic emerges especially when conflicting scientific narratives are made public, and additional scientific information is either unavailable or unable to resolve the tension.

One response to this would be to advocate for a more scientifically literate population. If people understood scientific findings better, would not the authority and legitimacy of the scientific community be on more solid ground? Aside from the practical challenges of achieving such a goal, Thoreau would likely find the suggestion quite naive. Greater scientific literacy is beneficial, but simply understanding the findings and methods of science does not cultivate a uniform imagination of what that information means. The moment that the scientist interprets her knowledge to imply certain behavioral, moral, or political responses, she has switched disciplines, and requires the insights of history, philosophy, or theology and ethics to come to her conclusion. In other words, the proliferation of unbiased, uncorrupted scientific information that is intellectually accessible cannot overcome the seemingly infinite diversity of individual imaginations and the subsequent need to conceive environmental problems and solutions as interdisciplinary.

Science also seems to provide a neutral common ground and language on which decision makers from vastly different cultures can find critical agreement. This is undoubtedly true on many levels, but given vast differences in education, access to information and research facilities, and books in native languages, the universality inevitably narrows. Sharing such resources, education, and scientific findings is critical to global environmental cooperation, but this will not overcome vast differences in cultural prejudices and subjectivity that necessarily find their way to the negotiation table.

In sum, the idyllic imagination pulls environmental thought toward what I have labeled "Arcadian ecology," or a kind of environmental scientism. Scientism is defined in a number of ways. In one sense, it is the corruption of the scientific enterprise for the sake of achieving social and political power. It is an ideology that subordinates the sciences' historical concern with the pursuit of truth, to the pursuit of extra-scientific influence. As Lee Trepanier summarizes further, drawing on the work of Eric Voegelin:

> Scientism is an ideology grounded on the assumption that facts can be distinguished from values: facts are derived from scientific methods, while values are the product of subjective prejudice or opinion. On the one hand, knowledge is restricted to phenomena that conform to the scientific method because

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> this process is objective, valid, and universal; on the other hand, metaphysical speculation is dismissed as an illegitimate form of knowledge because it is unscientific.[49]

To achieve the ideal of scientific objectivity, the scientist would have to somehow "deactivate" his or her imagination, in a sense. But knowledge is neither encountered, possessed, nor shared ahistorically. There is a level of subjectivity irremovable from the scientific inquiry because knowledge does not exist independent of the knower.

This inevitable subjectivity, though, is not cause for dismissing science nor the existence of truth. Historically, everything from mathematics to theology was considered a kind of "science" because it was assumed that knowledge was much more complex than what one encountered with the senses. Modern scientism, by distinguishing itself from these seemingly more speculative fields, arbitrarily limits genuine knowledge to what the scientific method offers.

Thoreau did not eschew mystery and was animated by an insatiable curiosity in the nonhuman world. Far from an abandonment of imagination, speculation, and spirituality, Thoreau's science was more holistic and less ideological. In his *Journal* he writes, "Men are probably nearer to the essential truth in their superstitions than in their science."[50] He pursued and defended truth passionately and knew that science was one of many ways by which to find it.

The moral environmental imagination exemplified by Thoreau is most clearly seen in his resistance to an emerging scientism, and his eschewal of disciplinary boundaries just as their limits were being drawn. An environmentalism animated by the moral imagination will ultimately follow in Thoreau's footsteps, elevating cooperation between the humanities and sciences, rather than cultivating conflict.

Thoreau's example then leads to an environmental politics and thought that is broadly interdisciplinary, and conceives of knowledge in a much more comprehensive sense. Yet many contemporary environmentalists will decry the obvious anthropocentrism inherent in this approach, but such a position is fundamentally inescapable. Environmentalism does not exist apart from environmentalists. Treating ecological crises as crises of objective science and economics is ultimately incomplete, but not unhelpful. At their core, environmental crises are crises of culture, morality, and spirituality. They are, as Buell said, crises of imagination.

Colleges and universities developing "environmental studies" programs frequently offer excellent examples of an interdisciplinary approach that appreciates this comprehensive nature of ecological crises. The student takes a course on environmental science, but he has also studied Thoreau's *Walden* and the poetry of William Wordsworth. Another student focuses on environ-

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mental economics, while exploring the field of environmental history and reading Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The point in doing this is not to find in Wordsworth a program for solving climate change, but for exploring how environmental questions are integral to the human condition, and vice versa. It is not by abandoning the humanities and becoming less anthropocentric that a moral environmental imagination is achieved. Instead, it is by seeking to become more fully human that society discovers its obligation to the nonhuman world and the need to love and care for the earth.

Rejecting or subordinating the humanities and human interests for the sake of the environment is self-defeating because it inhibits the discovery of the more fundamental moral obligations man has to the nonhuman world. In other words, being more human *means*, in part, being more environmentally responsible. Science and economics cannot reveal or explore this reality in the way the humanities can.

The elevation of the humanities, however, requires making explicit an assumption that is increasingly controversial. Humans are distinguished from other animals, in part, by their need to "become more human." From a biological or physiological standpoint a human being has distinctive characteristics that he or she shares with all other human beings and not with other creatures. But going back to the time of the Ancient Greeks and before, the designation "human," has long meant something more than what biology may describe. With Aristotle, especially, there was a sense that human beings developed to fulfill certain purposes, cultivate friendships, and acquire greater moral and spiritual self-understanding and responsibility. Who am I? Why am I here? Why is there something and not nothing? These are questions which mankind has confronted for millennia and offered a seemingly infinite number of answers. But the humanistic enterprise exists precisely to meet these challenges in ways that modern science cannot.

The notion of "becoming more human" and the invocation of Aristotle, however, provokes an immediate objection, also inspired by Thoreau. Does this mean that some individuals, such as children, slaves, or the mentally handicapped are less human, even subhuman, because they are less developed in a sense? This objection fails to see that human dignity, worth, value, and inviolability are not "developed." "Becoming more human," is not the same as becoming more "valuable" or "worthy," it is the process of becoming more attuned to reality and understanding the individual and community's place in it. Science, however, cannot achieve this on its own. "Reality," is more than what can be measured and identified by empirical methods, and includes the moral and spiritual order within which material reality resides and acquires meaning. In this way, the sciences and the humanities work together in this "becoming."

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The humanities and sciences also offer a kind of "check" on one another. The humanities moderate the sciences by emphasizing the limits of empirical inquiry, by scrutinizing the implications of scientific discovery, and by imposing ethical restraints on the applications of science. Science can identify innovative technologies for more destructive warfare, for example, but the humanities offers a critical space in which to discuss the ethics of such a project. Science, in turn, keeps the humanities "on the ground," as it were, always asking for more evidence and attention to procedure.

This interdisciplinary model of environmentalism is more universal for the purposes of global environmental governance and moderates against the extremes undermining environmental politics. International governance is ultimately the story of people working together toward a common goal, drawing on different streams of knowledge and culture. What ultimately provides the unity and common ground necessary for effective cooperation is not an allegedly transcultural scientific knowledge, but a common humanity.

Thoreau's example of this interdisciplinary spirit is rooted in his affection for the work of another great scientist of his day: Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt's popular writings worked to recover the symbol of the "Cosmos," from ancient times to help frame the scientific enterprise. By invoking the notion of a "cosmos," Laura Dassow Walls observes, Humboldt "hoped to revive in modern sensibilities the ancient Greek concept of the universe as an ordered and beautiful whole. His leading assertion was that nature does exist wholly independent of us, but the Cosmos does not—for the vision of nature as an ordered and beautiful whole is a human achievement, an achievement just as much part of the Cosmos as the most distant stellar nebulae or the lichens on a nearby rock."[51]

This "Cosmos," Humboldt and Thoreau knew, could not be apprehended by empirical observation alone. Reality, at its core, is relational and historical. As part of Nature itself, humans are the means by which this relational and historical character is revealed. Who we are then—morally, spiritually, intellectually—has profound implications for what we know and how we use that knowledge to confront the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century.

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Conclusion

"Henry Thoreau," E. B. White once observed, "has probably been more wildly misconstrued than any other person of comparable literary stature."[1] White illustrates this problem in an entertaining *New Yorker* article called "Visitors to the Pond" (1953) where he recounts a brief (and likely fictional) excursion to Walden Pond with then Senator Joseph McCarthy, who was visiting at McCarthy's request. White describes a conversation in which McCarthy is trying to understand why people consider Thoreau to be quintessentially American, and why copies of *Walden* had been found in the U.S. Information Services offices overseas. McCarthy suspects Thoreau of being sympathetic to communism and deeply antithetical to capitalism. White, a critic of McCarthy, reads aloud several passages from Thoreau's work in hopes of defending Thoreau, but McCarthy is not persuaded. Thoreau was a cultural force to be reckoned with and, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, McCarthy (or White's portrayal of him) viewed him as anathema to his own definition of "American."

Whether Thoreau was genuinely "American," is less important, though than the simple observation that he was human. He lived between the moral and idyllic imagination as all persons do, and the struggle shaped his writings and legacy. Reading Thoreau through the framework of imagination has opened an insightful window on the complexity and nature of this legacy. The tension between the moral and idyllic imagination both frees Thoreau from, and accounts for, the imposition of the preconceived ideologies and political allegiances with which he has often been identified. His importance for American thought and culture has made him a useful ally for many causes—even if he himself may not have agreed to such alliances. An honest conclusion regarding Thoreau's politics and imagination does not place him

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in a particular ideological camp or in any single intellectual tradition. His extensive intellectual footprint testifies to his versatility and confirms the degree to which his readers share his imaginative tensions and sympathies.

Identifying the moral-idyllic tension in Thoreau has also subjected him and his work to a critical assessment. The working theory of imagination offers a means of ascertaining whether a particular kind of will and imagination is ethically admirable by reflecting on experiential reality itself.[2] The moral, aesthetical, and philosophical life involves a constant struggle between becoming attuned to reality and revolting against or evading it. Neither Thoreau nor any finite human being is exempt from this struggle, and everyone is free to choose their quality of imagination. To read Thoreau's work as exhibiting the idyllic-moral tension is a way of acknowledging his humanity.

Given Thoreau's deeply human struggle between the idyllic and moral imagination, how might current and future readers prepare themselves for an encounter with his thought? What are the idyllic elements one should resist? What moral and political insights of Thoreau's recommend themselves? On questions of political morality, friendship, freedom, and nature, how closely should one follow him? Thoreau tends to favor the idyllic imagination on many accounts, but he is never entirely or permanently on one side or the other. His reputation and interest in his work are only increasing, but his readers would benefit from recommendations and admonitions before diving deeply into his writings.

Contemporary and former scholars of Thoreau's work, though, may accuse me of setting a trap. The very definition of the idyllic imagination seems taken from a biographical sketch of Thoreau, and the moral imagination favors the virtues and standards of Western Civilization—especially its classical and Christian foundations—the latter of which Thoreau spoke vehemently against. In this light, it would seem that Thoreau never had a chance. Under the standard of the moral imagination and the higher will, though, there will always be room for improvement. Thoreau's struggle is a human struggle, but how individuals confront their own idyllic-moral tension is shaped by the encounter with his imagination and that of others. At different times and places and on different questions, individuals, and groups may favor a particular imagination over another. If the moral imagination is to predominate, however, one needs exemplars and traditions for encouragement, guidance, and warnings. Thoreau is for many individuals and groups such an exemplar to which they continue to turn, but they will not always find in his work something commendable. Thoreau's idyllic imagination should be resisted while looking to his moral imagination for salutary examples.

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THE IDYLLIC THOREAU

Thoreau imagines persons as subordinate to an abstract and ahistorical notion of "Right" and to an idealistic vision of friendship. Historical contingency, traditions, and conventions, as well as the obligations of human community, threatened his autonomy and risked undermining fidelity to a "Higher Law." His opposition to slavery and American imperialism may have been admirable, but his intuition tended toward misanthropy, escapism, and a naive political morality. While Thoreau could recognize an element of the universal in particular persons, humanity in general increasingly exasperated him. The same could be said of his view of government. He may have accurately identified limitations of democracy and law, but he left little room for a more positive conception of government to emerge. His critique of political life did not offer a concrete alternative to unjust regimes; instead, he nearly advocated the abolition of government altogether.

A number of problematic elements in Thoreau's work have been identified, but it will be helpful to focus on three major aspects of his imagination that are troubling and idyllic, and which are difficult to reconcile with what has here been called the moral imagination. First, the moral imagination resists Thoreau's idyllic political morality and understanding of freedom. The cornerstone of Thoreau's moral philosophy was fidelity to an ahistorical, abstract notion of an objective Right or the "Higher Law." Taking practical efficacy and historical circumstances into account would violate the purity of Thoreau's moralism. This disregard of actual situations renders even his most mature political writings impractical and naive. He is even resentful of the contingencies of human life. This unrealistic moralism coincides with Thoreau's problematic notion of freedom. He asserts freedom almost exclusively in a negative sense and connects it to the desire for autonomy and a preference for "wildness." Thoreau's freedom is not defined merely by the ability to choose or do whatever one wills. His freedom lacks external sources of order. He may appeal to "Right" or a "Higher Law," but it is difficult to find any definite meaning in these notions. Thoreau's concern for autonomy is taken to the extreme of eschewing tradition and the influences of others, although they might provide critical access to evidence of a "Higher Law." He objects to conformity of any kind, except to the moral imperatives that he generates for himself. Given this disposition, how could Thoreau know and follow Right without violating his notion of autonomy? Ultimately, his assertion of freedom as a lack of order and radical autonomy undermines the order which makes that freedom possible, because he makes freedom an end in itself. As David Walsh writes, the idea of freedom as an ahistorical end may be self-defeating:

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> As an "idea" freedom of choice is a contradiction in terms, since the alternatives are always given from somewhere outside of ourselves. But as an Idea, freedom of choice makes eminent sense because it is not simply an abstract choice between options, but the living process by which we make the possibilities our own. Freedom is not the end; it is rather what freedom makes possible. Then we see that the truth of freedom is the necessity of bending itself toward what is necessary. The truth of freedom is disclosed in action, not by thought in advance.[3]

The second major pitfall in Thoreau's idyllic imagination concerns his abstract notion of persons and friendship. Too few in his time were as adamant as Thoreau in their opposition to slavery, but he offered little in the way of an understanding of persons that would convincingly support his position. His disappointment with human society and relationships led him to an imagination of friendship in which the *ideal* of persons was more real than concrete persons. His frustration led him toward an Arcadian longing and the pursuit of an idealized companionship with nonhuman nature characteristic of the idyllic imagination. He castigated his own community for its failure to live up to his moral ideals and found society and solace among nonhumans. Though not thoroughly and consistently misanthropic, he had a desire for autonomy and fulfilling relationships that drove him away from the very social interaction that might have offered him the more human and authentic community he longed for. While he did at times demonstrate profound selflessness in his care for slaves, children, the disabled, and Irish immigrants, the imagination expressed in his writings potentially inspires a much less admirable disposition. His distaste for actual, as opposed to ideal, community also undermines his legacy for environmentalism, which relies extensively on strong communities to maintain environmentally sustainable lifestyles and to achieve political effectiveness.

Finally, Thoreau's tendency toward "sentimental environmentalism" and an idyllic spirituality complicates efforts to protect both human dignity and environmental well-being. Thoreau's latent misanthropy and disappointment with human society led him away from community and toward an escapist longing for an idyllic "Arcadia." Nature was imagined as divine, generous, benevolent and ultimately in control. The nonhuman world could provide moral imperatives and answers to life's ultimate questions. Yet this elevation of the nonhuman world often took place at the expense of human traditions and a sense of history. For example, Thoreau did not look for ways in which traditional religions might support or accommodate the concern for environmental well-being. His reflections functioned as replacements for the faiths that surrounded him, and for Christianity in particular. The disregard of a more explicitly down-to-earth wisdom and community risked the neglect of other actual humans—including the slaves and others he fought to protect.

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THE IDYLLIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION

While the idyllic environmental imagination, characterized by an Arcadian longing, the pursuit of an idealized nonhuman community, and the divinization of nature are not Thoreau's only environmental legacy, they do seem to dominate the environmental imaginations of his twentieth and twenty-first century heirs. As several scholars and authors have observed, for example, contemporary environmentalism is often characterized by political naïveté, an uncompromising and absolutist disposition, and an attraction to ideology.

While a number of problematic consequences of Thoreau's imagination have already been considered, two more warrant consideration. The first is the idyllic imagination's opposition to compromise. David Brower, the first executive director of the Sierra Club, especially, grew less and less amenable to compromise over time. When he and the Sierra Club won the fight to prevent a dam being built in Dinosaur National Monument, they did so by agreeing not to oppose the building of a dam in Glen Canyon. The compromise and subsequent flooding of the canyon devastated Brower, and he regretted the decision for the rest of his life. Seldom would he even entertain the notion of political or economic compromise ever again. The radical environmental group Greenpeace was similar. Though they've made considerable efforts to create a network of professional researchers and lobbyists advocating for environmental concerns, they ultimately have less interest in conventional methods of social, economic, and political cooperation.

This uncompromising or stubborn disposition is a staple of radical environmental groups and is rooted in Thoreau's notion of an ahistorical, abstract "Right" meant to animate political morality. Environmentalists have, one might argue, compromised far too much as it is. The planet itself has become a victim of compromise. That said, the presence of competing interests and concerns is a permanent element of political and economic life. Trying to overcome environmental problems rooted in politics and economics without compromise is an attempt to solve political and economic problems without politics and economics. Eschewing compromise is another way of ignoring the human condition, the nature of community and cooperation, and neglecting the complexity of environmental problems. Many environmental organizations, including Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, have achieved their greatest victories precisely through compromise, not by avoiding it.

There remains, however, a pervasive sense that if people genuinely understood the plight of the planet and the way in which environmental well-being affects them, they too would hold a similar, uncompromising perspective. Indeed, if society could only eliminate the anthropocentrism Buell decries, mankind might not find David Brower and similar figures so controversial. It is as if within every human being there is a John Muir or a Henry David

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Thoreau just waiting to be freed. While political and economic elites seemingly tend to repress these parts of the self, the masses are more attuned to it, paving the way for environmentalists' curious idealization of democracy.

The mechanism of democracy, as such, is not at issue here. Its imperfections aside, few would prefer the alternatives. With Greenpeace in particular, though, there is a belief that more direct democracy, uninhibited by obstacles of limited suffrage, campaign funding, representation, corporate influence, etc.—will produce ecologically beneficial results. In a manner reminiscent of Rousseau's "general will," Greenpeace and similar organizations defend a view of democracy in which the uninhibited electoral "voice of the people," will naturally advocate ecocentric politics. When governments and corporations neglect their responsibility to protect the environment, it is evidence that the democratic process has broken down, leaving Greenpeace and others to become the megaphone of the people. They hold considerable faith in direct democracy as well as their apparently privileged access to the general interests and will of the population, as well as the interest and will of the nonhuman world. From this faith there has emerged a whole subdiscipline of environmental studies inquiring into notions of democratic environmentalism and "green citizenship."

What happens, though, when direct democracy fails to produce more ecocentric results? Will those voting more anthropocentrically be forced to become more ecocentric in the manner Rousseau suggests that those contradicting the general will are forced to be free? While this may seem far-fetched, the vitriol with which skeptics of catastrophic climate change are treated—including suggestions that their houses be set on fire and they be imprisoned—suggest limitations to the ostensibly democratic ethos of modern environmentalism.

Thoreau, as evidenced in his contrasting attitudes toward democracy in "Resistance to Civil Government," had mixed attitudes toward what "the people," might accomplish if given a more uninhibited voice. And, like Thoreau, many environmental groups recognize that "pure democracy," to the extent that such a thing is even possible, does not always do the "right" thing, as they define it. Constitutions, representation, and laws are necessary to mediate democratic politics, just as compromise, lobbying, and cooperation are necessary to achieve environmental goals. This does not mean that democracy ought to be abandoned. On the contrary, democracy provides the greatest opportunities for environmental interests to have a substantive impact on politics and law. A constitutional democracy, however, provides a framework for introducing the necessary restraints on popular sovereignty by ordering the political community toward ethical goals—including environmental well-being.

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To lay all the failures of environmentalism at the feet of Thoreau would be inaccurate and inconsistent with his complex legacy. He has had, for example, considerable influence on the sentimental environmentalism of Arne Naess and so-called deep ecology, but he has also provided a foundational inspiration for the more historically minded and traditional Wendell Berry. Thoreau was a muse for the eccentric John Muir, but also motivated the likes of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. These individuals and others might have exhibited the tension between the idyllic and the moral imagination even without Thoreau, but his example and imagination provided a critical point of reference for how they navigated that tension.

THE EXEMPLARY THOREAU

Irving Babbitt, referred to throughout this study, may be accused, like many culturally conservative thinkers, of asserting a merely negative understanding of morality. Instead of duties and obligations, the conservative seems obsessed with a list of "thou-shalt-not's." T. S. Eliot, a student of Babbitt's, once wrote in exasperation, "What is the higher will to *will* . . . ? If this will is to have anything on which to operate, it must be in relation to external objects and to objective values."[4] Eliot desired a more concrete morality or a set of norms by which to identify both what the higher will resists and what it affirms. For Babbitt, as Eliot well knew, the higher will was supposed to be a "will to civilization," but Eliot failed to recognize exactly what Babbitt meant by "civilization." In some ways, this lack of definition on Babbitt's part may be intentional. As Ryn explains, "[Babbitt's] actual theory is that morality has two aspects: the renunciation and the affirmation of impulse. They form part of one and the same effort to realize the good. In its relation to impulses that are destructive of our spiritual unity and hence of our happiness, the higher will is felt as a check; the moral purpose is advanced by censuring what is opposed to it."[5] In other words, this renunciation or "inner check," as Babbitt calls it, has an affirmative aspect. Eliot notes how Babbitt's inner check identifies a "habit" of will with a preference for civilization, while leaving open the precise content of what this habit of will *wills*—a notion that Eliot finds unsatisfactory. Ironically, Ryn explains, Eliot's interpretation is precisely what Babbitt had in mind, but Eliot did not understand that Babbitt's explanation answers his question of what the will *wills*.[6] The *quality* of the higher will is always the same but the *specifics* of what needs to be done depend on the circumstances of the moral actor. At times, Thoreau seems to recognize the possibility of cultivating this kind of habit or "inner check," that is in a manner consistent with the "will to civilization." Are there, then, elements of moral imagination in Thoreau's vision of life that recommend him?

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Despite the impractical nature of Thoreau's moral philosophy, he did evince tendencies more compatible with the moral imagination. This is especially true of his recognition that who a person is, and especially what he or she loves, is critical to what one sees, hears, and understands. Imagination and will are critical to how persons live in, and come to know, the world around them, and this character and imagination manifests itself in politics. Thoreau recognizes that the political community is "man writ large." He also did not abandon the traditional notion of a higher and lower will within man. There is good and evil and mankind is capable of either. Though he did not embrace a conventional doctrine of sin, he held a relatively realistic view of humanity's moral predicament and the need to favor that which is higher.

Notwithstanding humanity's moral predicament and tendency to make a mess, Thoreau did not abandon the centrality of freedom. A consistent theme throughout his life and writings was not so much that freedom was always license or a problem, but that freedom was fundamental to a full, "deliberately lived" human life. By denying slaves their freedom, the Southern slaveholders and complacent Northerners were not simply exploiting blacks' labor; they denied them an opportunity to fully realize their personhood. Thoreau's moralism and imagination of freedom as wildness risked undermining this central purpose and his quest for freedom, but he was never intentionally an enemy of human liberty. The higher will *wills* civilization, but that will must be free to will civilization, community, and the good life. What definition of freedom then would improve on Thoreau's? As Ryn explains:

> Freedom can be adequately understood only in conjunction with the moral worth of chosen goals, so that a person is free in the most profound political sense only to the extent that by his actions he enriches and fulfills his life. Community being the highest value, happiness lies in the widest possible sharing of the good life with others. Freedom, therefore, is properly the ability to act with concern for what promotes the spiritual well-being of all affected. In the strictest sense, a people can be said to be exercising freedom in governing itself only when it is genuinely trying to realize the conditions of community.[7]

Thoreau does not share Ryn's prioritization of community, but he does demonstrate a profound concern for spiritual well-being and a fulfilling life. In *Walden*, for example, Thoreau wishes to draw persons away from a life of "quiet desperation"[8] and toward a life lived deliberately and animated by wonder and conviction. Community, as an aspect of freedom properly understood, is not, for Thoreau, necessarily a source of a richer life for the individual.

Thoreau's moral imagination is particularly noticeable in his relationship to the scientific inquiry of his day. Exemplifying the "Humboldtian" tradition, Thoreau imagined himself and the nonhuman world as part of an infi-

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nitely complex "cosmos" characterized by beauty and order. And while he celebrated the rapidly advancing natural sciences of his day, this did not undermine his enthusiasm for poetry, aesthetics, and the humanities as ways of knowing that were just as compelling as scientific methods. He resisted a temptation toward overly narrow specialization and an arrogant scientism and saw in the nonhuman world both its biological complexity and its extraordinary beauty.

A final aspect of Thoreau's imagination to recommend concerns his intuition of the natural nonhuman world. He may indeed overstate the association of the divine with nature, but he moves his readers toward a sacramentality akin to that of the moral imagination. As Buell has shown, Thoreau is important because he provided a language by which humans could express the immateriality of nature without abandoning its materiality. Despite his shortcomings, Thoreau inspired a type of environmental imagination by asking the right questions about humanity's place relative to the nonhuman world, by exploring how human beings were implicated in and impacted by natural history, and by considering what humanity might lose should the "tonic of wilderness" be diminished. His interrogations of his experience with nature were both unique and timely. At the time of his death, environmental well-being had begun to be threatened as never before by industrialization, civil war, and ill-conceived agricultural practices. In the wake of Thoreau, individuals, armed with his kind of imagination, were ready to resist the unchecked march of environmental destruction which had accelerated after the Civil War. Figures such as John Muir, John Burroughs, Henry Salt, and others found Thoreau to be very useful in these times. And while they may have inherited some of his vices, they also frequently embraced Thoreau's virtues.

TOWARD A MORAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION

The tension between the moral and idyllic imagination has profound implications for politics. How rulers and the ruled intuit what is good, true, and beautiful shapes who and what they love, how they behave, how citizens vote and live in community, what individuals and groups believe about meaning and spirituality and how they care for the natural environment. This importance of imagination and its relationship to will and reason gives tremendous power and responsibility to those who influence the content of our intuitions, namely artists, directors, authors, musicians, the mass media, marketing strategists, educators, and so on. The individuals and groups who take this responsibility seriously need to cultivate the kind of imagination that resists idyllic imagination and the lower will.

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Edmund Burke once referred to the moral imagination's sources as the "bank and capital of nations and of ages." An ancient and evolving heritage is critical to the development of moral imagination, as well as to a corresponding just and free society. In contrast to the French Revolution's dictum that "the dead should not rule the living," Burke believed that the dead—embodied and immortalized in traditions and a historically informed reason—should help guide the living.[9] Thoreau, by contrast, made considerable efforts to resist the influence of others. His imagination of genuine freedom as wildness and autonomy often closed him off to valuable sources of tradition. He once wrote, in a tone reminiscent of the French Revolution, "I love man-kind, but I hate the institutions of the dead unkind. Men execute nothing so faithfully as the wills of the dead, to the last codicil and letter. *They* rule this world, and the living are but their executors."[10]

As much as he resisted the influence of others, Thoreau demonstrated considerable debt to Emerson, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Charles Darwin, ancient Rome, Coleridge, and German idealism. One way of resisting some of the more problematic aspects of his legacy and to recover his neglected virtues, is to evaluate and supplement these historical sources. This is particularly true in regards to Thoreau's relationship to Christianity. He was not an orthodox Christian and resisted it in many ways. Yet by abandoning the Christian tradition as a resource of moral and historical insight, he neglected ideas and examples which may, at minimum, have deepened his opposition to slavery, ordered his notion of freedom, and discouraged his abstract moralism and misanthropy. He may have found the Bible and Christian tradition considerable allies in his quest to understand and care for the natural nonhuman world as many Christians in the twentieth-century discovered. Pope Francis and the Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, for example, have written extensively on the environment. Francis has gone so far as to release an encyclical drawing on scripture and centuries of Church tradition to make the case for confronting climate change.[11] While Christians in Thoreau's day were virtually silent on questions of environmental well-being and ethics (and mostly remained silent until the late twentieth century) a Thoreau more sympathetic to Christianity could have conceivably remedied this oversight.

Examining the moral-idyllic tension in which Thoreau lives may prove fruitful to scholars interested in untangling the contested and complex nature of his literary style, aesthetics, moral philosophy, and the many aspects of his life and thought not covered in this book. The findings of this study offer promising possibilities for examining this tension as it emerges in later environmentalists and others who have inherited Thoreau's legacy. One can imagine, for example, fruitful studies of the idyllic-moral tension in the environmental imaginations of Rachel Carson, John Muir, David Brower, Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, and others. The attention to the imagination could shed significant light on the moral crises and "doublethink" identified by Buell,

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offer insights into and resistance to the ecototalitarian impulses lamented by Charles Rubin, and expose the often strange and failed environmental policies and laws described by Robert Nelson.

"When the history of the twentieth century is finally written," Robert Nisbet once observed, "the single most important social movement of the period will be judged to be environmentalism."[12] While this may be overstated,[13] the extraordinary influence of such a young movement is impressive. It is part of the very fabric of Western culture, shaping everything from marketing and tourism to health care and national security. Environmentalism has transformed industries and created entirely new ones. While much work remains to be done, the environmental aftermath of Thoreau and his readers is remarkable.

Thoreau will continue to be an important part of the conversation on political morality and environmental imagination for as long as humans wrestle with problems of freedom, civil rights and civil liberties, law, pollution, diminishing biodiversity, climate change, and deforestation. Even more important, Thoreau will warrant attention because he asked timeless questions about what it means to be fully human, why freedom is so central, and why the natural, nonhuman world was always more than mere materiality. He did not always provide laudable answers to these questions, but, as Babbitt once said of Rousseau, "it is no small distinction even to have asked the right questions."[14]

NOTES

1. E. B. White, "The Individualist," in *Writings from* the New Yorker: *1927–1976*, ed. by Rebecca M. Dale, (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) p. 39.
2. Ryn, (1997) p. xix.
3. David Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence*, (New York: Cambridge University, 2008) pp. 114–15.
4. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960) p. 425. Emphasis in original; quoted in Ryn, (1997) p. 33.
5. Ryn, (1997) p. 32.
6. Ryn, (1997) p. 34. Additionally, as Ryn explains, "It should be made explicit that in viewing the inner check as the unifying principle of civilization, Babbitt takes it for granted that there are other aspects of the work of civilization than moral effort. But to him the final measure of progress is the extent to which the various pursuits of society, such as science, art and politics, advance the moral end of goodness." Ryn, (1997) p. 35.
7. Ryn, (1990) pp. 164–65.
8. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 50.
9. As C. S. Lewis writes, "Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors. This modifies the picture which is sometimes painted of a progressive emancipation from tradition and a progressive control of natural processes resulting in a continual increase of human power . . . the later a generation comes—the nearer it lives to that date at which the species becomes extinct—the less power it will have in the forward direction, because its subject will be so few." *The Abolition of Man*, originally published, 1944, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001) pp.56–57.

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10. Thoreau, *A Week*, pp. 81–82.
11. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015). Also see Pope Benedict XVI, *The Environment*, collected and ed. by Jacquelyn Lindsey, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).
12. Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 101.
13. See Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
14. Babbitt, (1979) p. 24.

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